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Rev. James R. Cox, Ph.D.

SERMONS ON PENANCE,

AND ON

EVERYTHING REQUIRED FOR CHRISTIAN REPENTANCE AND AMENDMENT OF LIFE.

ADAPTED FOR ALL THE SUNDAYS AND MOST OF THE HOLYDAYS OF THE YEAR.

BY THE

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Bishop of Retimo and Vicar-Apostolic of the Eastern Vicariate of the Cape Colony.

252

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

SERMON		PAGE
I.	On Hearing the Word of God for Sinners who are thinking of doing Penance,	7
	ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE THE SINNER TO SPEEDY REPENTANCE.	
II.	On the Vain Labor of those who are in the State of Sin,	21
III.	On the Injurious Treatment of which the Sinner who defers Repentance is guilty towards God,	35
IV.	On the Little Hope of Salvation there is for the Sinner who Defers Repentance,	48
V.	On the Difficulty that the Sinner will have in Correcting his Bad Habits if he Defers Repentance,	60
VI.	On the Torment caused by a Bad Conscience,	73
VII.	On the False Peace of a Sinful Conscience,	88
VIII.	On the Ignorance which the Sinner voluntarily seeks in order to find Peace of Conscience,	102
IX.	On Culpable Ignorance as a Cause of many Sins,	114
X.	On the Blindness and Obduracy of the Sinner as a Punishment of Sin,	127
	ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE SINNER TO DO SPEEDY PENANCE.	
XI.	On the Goodness with which God Protects the Sinner on account of Penance,	143
XII.	On the Mercy of God in Bearing Patiently with and Receiving Sinners,	157
XIII.	On the Trials with which God Visits the Sinner,	171
XIV.	Mary is the Refuge of Sinners who wish to do Penance,	186
	ON THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.	
XV.	On the Necessity of the Sacrament of Penance,	200
XVI.	On Confession as an Easy Means of Salvation,	213
XVII.	On the Efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance,	226
	ON THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE BEFORE CONFESSION.	
XVIII.	On the Prayer of the Sinner who is about to go to Confession,	240
XIX.	On the Nature of the Examen of Conscience,	252
XX.	On Candor in the Examen of Conscience,	256

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5-84

ON SORROW FOR SIN.

SERMON		PAGE
XXI.	On the Necessity and Nature of Sorrow for Sin,	279
XXII.	On the Properties of True Sorrow for Sin,	291

MOTIVES OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

XXIII.	On Repentance for Sin on account of the Strict Justice of God,	306
XXIV.	On Repentance for Sin, because it Offends our Heavenly Father,	318

ON THE PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

XXV.	On the Nature of the Purpose,	331
XXVI.	On the Necessity of Removing the Proximate Occasion of Sin,	344
XXVII.	On the Vain Excuse of the Sinner who says he is not in the Proximate Occasion,	358
XXVIII.	On the Excuse of the Sinner who says that he cannot Avoid the Occasion,	370

ON DISCLOSING ONE'S SINS IN CONFESSION.

XXIX.	On the Choice of a Good Confessor,	384
XXX.	On the Matter of Confession,	397
XXXI.	On the Manner in which One should Make his Confession,	410
XXXII.	On Concealing Sins in Confession through Shame,	423

ON MAKING A GENERAL CONFESSION.

XXXIII.	On the Advantage of a General Confession, as far as One's Past Life is Concerned,	439
XXXIV.	On the Advantage of a General Confession, as far as the Next Life is Concerned,	451

ON SATISFACTION AND DOING PENANCE AFTER CONFESSION.

XXXV.	On the Penitential Works that the Sinner owes to God and to Himself,	465
XXXVI.	On Doing Penance in Prosperity and in Adversity,	479
XXXVII.	On the Penitential Works of the Innocent and the Just,	493
XXXVIII.	On the Reasonableness of Works of Penance for us who adore a Suffering and Mortified God,	506

FIRST SERMON.

ON HEARING THE WORD OF GOD FOR SINNERS WHO ARE THINKING OF DOING PENANCE.

Subject.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is especially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting. For if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Si dimisero eos jejunos in domum suam, deficient in via.—Mark viii. 3.

"And if I shall send them away fasting to their homes, they will faint in the way."

Introduction.

Mark, my dear brethren, the wonderful zeal of those pious people; so anxious were they to follow Jesus Christ, and to hear His divine words, that they forgot to provide themselves with food and drink, and had to suffer the pangs of hunger. But at last our merciful Saviour said, "I have compassion on the multitude; for behold, they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat;" if I do not provide them with food, they will perish with hunger: "If I shall send them away fasting to their home, they will faint in the way." Ah, my dear brethren, would that all Christians nowadays were as anxious and eager to hear the word of God, as some pious souls are, who are wont to say that they would rather go without their meals than miss their usual sermon! Would to God, I say, that all were so disposed! Nor would they therefore have to suffer

hunger; they would rather receive a spiritual strength to keep them from perishing. But, alas! I may well say with Christ, "I have compassion on the multitude;" I pity the numbers of Christians in a city or community, who for three weeks, three months, three years, and even longer, receive no food for their souls, because, through their own culpable negligence, they seldom or never hear the word of God in sermons. I have a heartfelt pity for them; for what will become of their souls? "They will faint in the way;" there is nothing else for them; they will perish on the way to eternity, and be lost forever. I have elsewhere shown that the frequent, and, if possible, constant hearing the word of God in sermons is necessary and most useful to all sorts and conditions of men, that they may work out their salvation properly. To-day I shall prove that the same is true in a special sense for those actually in the state of sin, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

The frequent hearing of the word of God in sermons is specially necessary for those sinners who are actually in the state of sin, and who are thinking of repenting some time or other; for, if they do not hear the word of God, they must, humanly speaking, continue in their unhappy state, and be lost forever. Such is the whole subject.

A constant hunger to receive food for our souls in sermons, and the speedy repentance and conversion of sinners, are the end and object of this discourse. Help us thereto, O Almighty God, by Thy powerful grace, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angel.

If the sinner wishes to save his soul he must repent and be converted to God.

Without losing time in further preamble, I say to every sinner who is actually in the state of sin, if any such are here present, and I sincerely hope that there are none: Either you wish sooner or later to save your soul and go to heaven, or else you have given up all right to heaven, and are determined to be lost forever. One of these alternatives you must choose; there is no third way for you. Have you chosen the latter? Have you made up your mind to burn in the fire of hell amongst the demons? Alas! if such is the case, you are already in a despairing state, and I do not wonder that you have no desire to hear the word of God, to come to a sermon. But I can hardly believe that any Catholic who is in his right senses can form such a desperate resolution as that. Do you then expect some day or

other to save your soul, and to be happy forever with God in heaven? If so, I wish from my heart that your expectation may be fully realized! But if you are really in earnest about it, you must be converted to God by repentance, for that is the one, indispensably necessary means which you must adopt in order to save your soul. And your sorrow and repentance must be sincere, they must come from the very depths of your heart, they must be supernatural, and they must embrace all the sins you have committed. It will not do for you to be like the traitor Judas, who, driven to despair by the intolerable torment that his conscience caused him for having betrayed Jesus Christ, gave back to the high priests the money he had received from them; nor like the wicked king Antiochus, who, influenced by natural fear and dread of the death that was impending over him during his last illness, asked pardon of God, and promised to repent; your repentance must be founded on faith, you must hate and detest all your sins without a single exception, because they have offended God, and you must earnestly purpose never more to commit any sin whatever.

This he cannot do without a special preventing grace from God.

But this repentance and conversion you can never undertake with your natural strength alone; you require thereto the preventing and helping grace of God, and that, too, a special, extraordinary, powerful, and mighty grace, which God is not bound to give to any sinner, since He has the most indisputable right to condemn at once to hell him who has committed a mortal sin; and that grace must be one that enlightens your understanding so that you may see all the malice, gravity, and deformity of your sins, while, at the same time, it moves and impels your will to be sorry for and detest all your sins above all imaginable evils in the world. Now, when and where do you expect this extraordinary grace, which comes solely from the great mercy of God, this sudden change and conversion of your whole heart? Perhaps in your bed, where you waste the morning in unnecessary sleep? Or at home, where your mind is filled to distraction with worldly cares and business? Or at the parties and entertainments at which you spend your time in amusement? Or at table, while you are enjoying yourself eating and drinking and indulging your sensuality? Or even in the house of God, where the precept of the Church compels you to present yourself on Sundays and holydays, if you have still so much fear of the Lord left, and where you hear holy Mass with a cold and distracted heart? No; these are neither the places

nor the occupations in which the holy Spirit of God will find your heart ready for the influence of this great grace.

A grace that God is not wont to give, unless when the heart is disposed for it.

It is true that the Almighty God, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, can give you that grace in any place at any time, under any circumstances, and can at once excite you to true repentance and conversion; but, as theologians teach, He does not generally act in that way; He bestows His grace at a fitting time and in such places and circumstances in which the heart of man is disposed to receive it. I acknowledge that sinners have sometimes been converted suddenly, and, as it were, in a moment, when they were least thinking of such a thing, as was the case with Paul when he was struck blind by a light from heaven, while on his way to imprison and persecute the Christians. Sinners have been converted by being terror-stricken at seeing some dismal phantoms during the night, or because they were frightened by a terrible thunderstorm, or at the sudden death of some friend; or else they have been moved to repent and amend their lives by some great losses or misfortunes, or by having been put to shame before the world, or by having had some grievous illness to suffer. But a conversion of this kind is a rare, unusual, and, so to speak, miraculous event, which you cannot reasonably hope for, and certainly would not wish for. Still another means of repentance and conversion for the sinner is for him to devote his serious attention in the spirit of recollection to the meditation of heavenly things, according to the words of God to the Prophet Osee: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart."[1] That is to say, I will speak to the soul, and represent vividly to her her unhappy state, so as to excite her to repentance and contrition. But a means of this kind is not apt to be adopted by a man of the world, who, being occupied the whole day with worldly cares, hardly knows what to meditate on, and still less by one who, being actually in the state of sin, has closed his heart to the voice and invitation of God. Besides, what inclination or desire could you have to practise meditation in that way? For that desire or inclination is already the first preventing grace that God gives you for your conversion, and according to the usual course of divine Providence, it is bestowed in a fitting time and place on a heart that is more or less disposed to receive it.

[1] Propter hoc, ecce, ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus. —Osee ii. 14.

Hence there is no other means for you but to hear frequently the word of God in sermons; for the Holy Ghost speaks to the hearts of men by the living voice of His servants, whom He has commissioned to announce His word in His name. And this is the ordinary and at the same time the most powerful means of moving the sinner to true repentance and conversion; this is the two-edged sword, as St. Paul calls it, which penetrates the heart and pierces it with sorrow for sin: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit."[1] This is the burning fire, as God Himself calls it by the Prophet Jeremias, which consumes all earthly and wicked desires and inclinations: "Are not My words as a fire? saith the Lord; and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"[2] that is to say, have they not the power to move to contrition the heart of a sinner, even when it is hardened in guilt? This is that wonderful light which, as I have already said, displays before the eyes of the sinner the truths of eternity, and wakens him suddenly, by remorse of conscience, out of the deep sleep of sin, so that at last he surrenders to the irresistible influence of the known truth.

The ordinary means is to hear the word of God.

And such has been the experience of many who, through idle curiosity, and while their hearts were still hardened in evil, happened to hear a single sermon, and went away from it filled with true contrition by an unexpected ray of light from heaven. Palladius writes of a certain man named Moses, who, having been deprived of the office he held at court on account of some great crimes he committed, instead of acknowledging his guilt and trying to amend his life, plunged still deeper into the most enormous crimes, until he became at last the chief of a band of robbers. He happened once to enter a church, not out of piety, but probably with the intention of committing a robbery. Fortunately for him, the sermon had just begun, and the preacher was describing the strict account we shall have to render at the judgment seat, the terrible sentence that shall be passed on the wicked, and the joyful invitation that the children of God shall receive to eternal happiness. After hearing this sermon Moses became quite another man; filled with sorrow and weeping bitterly, he left the church and went to an adjacent monastery, where, having got rid of the heavy burden of his

As many have experienced; shown by examples.

[1] Vivus est enim sermo Dei, et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animæ ac spiritus.—Hebr. iv. 12.

[2] Numquid non verba mea sunt quasi ignis, dicit Dominus, et quasi malleus conterens petram?—Jerem. xxiii. 29.

sins, and having received permission to enter the order, he spent the remainder of his life in the greatest mortification and sanctity. In the Life of Father Jerome Lopez of our Society[1] I find a similar account of one who, having been insulted, swore that he would not rest until he had killed his enemy. Determined to glut his vengeance, he armed himself with six loaded pistols, and went into a forest, through which, he knew, his enemy was to pass. Through the mercy of God it happened that he met some peasants and shepherds who were running at full speed. "Where are you going in such a hurry?" he asked. "To the church in the village yonder," was the answer; "some preachers have just arrived there, and we wish to be in time for the sermon." The man at once felt curious to see what the strange preachers were like; he went with the peasants, and arrived in time to hear a sermon on the last judgment. But, long before it was over, he had to surrender to the grace of God; full of sorrow and repentance, he could hardly wait till the sermon was finished, when he fell on his knees before the preacher, and begged to be allowed to make his confession. For twenty-six years his conscience had been burdened by a grievous s that he had wilfully concealed in confession, and during all that time he had been making bad confessions and Communions, but now, to the priest's great consolation, he laid bare all the wickedness of his life with every sign of sincere sorrow, he accused himself of the revenge he had been meditating, he forgave his enemy from his heart, and left his weapons in the hands of the priest. Such power and might has the word of God over the human heart.

Confirmed by another example.

There is another most remarkable example that I cannot help relating. Heroldus in his "Promptuarium" tells us of a certain father, a man of great wealth and position, who (as is unfortunately but too often the case nowadays) was rather careless of the religious training of his children. He had two sons and a daughter; the youngest son was so wicked as to commit a horrid crime with his sister, whereat the other son became enraged, and having bitterly reproached his guilty brother, threatened to make known the whole thing to his father. The wicked young man, impatient of reproof and maddened at the thought of his guilt being known, plunged his sword into his brother's side and took to flight immediately. The unhappy father, acknowledging too late the fault he had been guilty of in training his children,

[1] Vita, l. ii., c. 5.

disinherited his wicked son. The latter, hearing of this, stole into the house one night and killed his father, while he was asleep, with the same sword with which he had taken away his brother's life. Burdened with those fearful crimes, he despaired of finding mercy from God, and wandered away under an assumed name into foreign countries, where he abandoned himself to all kinds of vice, so that he never thought of receiving the sacraments, or even of hearing Mass, since he looked on himself as already lost. While in this miserable condition he heard of a certain preacher, who spoke so eloquently that people flocked in crowds to hear him. Urged by curiosity, the despairing sinner determined that he, too, would go to hear the great preacher. (O good God, how wonderful is Thy mercy!) And he went to the sermon, which happened to be on the great patience that God displays in bearing with the sinner, and in receiving him again into his favor when he repents. Every word he heard pierced his heart like a sharp arrow, so that, when the sermon was over, he fell on his knees before the priest, and with many tears confessed all his sins. Before giving him absolution the priest told him to go and bewail his sins at the foot of the crucifix; the repentant man obeyed, but he was so overwhelmed with sorrow and contrition that he fell dead on the ground. Oh, happy soul and most desirable death! you may well say, my dear brethren. But wait till you hear the end of it. On the following day, as the preacher was recommending the soul of the deceased man to the prayers of the congregation, a snow-white dove was seen to fly about the church and to drop from its beak a note, which fell at the preacher's feet; the latter picked up the note and read it out for the congregation. It stated that, in spite of the enormity of his sins, the extraordinary contrition of the deceased man and the copious tears he had shed had completely freed his soul from all guilt and all punishment, so that he went to heaven immediately after his death. What do you think of that, my dear brethren? You wonder, do you not, at the power of perfect contrition and sorrow? And true it is that it can in a moment change the worst sinner into a friend of God, even without absolution, when there is no opportunity of receiving it; but how was that guilty man excited to such perfect sorrow and contrition? It was that sermon in which he heard the word of God, a word that can penetrate and pierce a heart as hard as a rock: "For the word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword."

Therefore the devil tries to keep sinners away from sermons.

Now, if effects of this kind are produced on sinners who go to hear a sermon merely by chance, or through curiosity, and with evil actually in their hearts, and are produced, too, by a single sermon, what may we not expect the word of God to do for those sinners who frequently and regularly hear sermons with a sincere desire to learn something good, and to be moved to repentance? Must they not be softened at last and brought to acknowledge their guilt and to return to God? Oh, well does the envious demon know that it is, humanly speaking, impossible for him to subject for any length of time to his yoke those who still have a desire to hear the word of God! And therefore he spares no effort to keep men away from sermons, lest they should become pious and escape out of his clutches. Thus, when the time comes for the sermon, he fills their minds with all kinds of business, which, he persuades them, is of the greatest importance and must be attended to at once; he gets them into talk with others, so that they may be kept at home; he excites wicked people to make fun of the preacher, so that they may not care to hear him; he persuades them that the hour appointed for the sermon is too early and inconvenient; that the weather is too warm or too cold, too damp, too windy, too harsh, and that they would injure their health if they ventured out of doors; he even suggests certain peculiar devotions, of which I have spoken on another occasion, and persuades them that it is better for them to practise those devotions than to hear a sermon. But if he cannot keep them away altogether, he at least tries to prevent them from coming in time, so that they cannot derive proper fruit from the sermon.

Therefore they must not allow themselves to be deceived by the devil in this particular.

Woe to you, O Christian, if you allow the lying spirit to deceive you in any way, so as to prevent you from hearing the word of God! "Never trust thy enemy," is the warning that the Holy Ghost gives us all by the wise Ecclesiasticus; and still less should you trust the enemy of your soul, "for as a brass pot his wickedness rusteth."[1] But you especially, O sinner, who are still in the state of sin, do not, for God's sake, allow the tempter to befool you, if you have any hope of saving your soul and going to heaven! I tell you distinctly that if you do not hear the word of God, there is no other means of conversion and repentance left for you. And further, you may be perfectly convinced that, if you are not moved to repent and amend your life

[1] Non credas inimico tuo in æternum; sicut enim æramentum æruginat nequitia illius. —Ecclus. xii. 10.

by hearing the word of God, you will never be moved to repentance by any other means, even if God were to work a miracle in your favor, which He will not do. "Yes," says St. John Chrysostom, "even if one were to rise from the dead, or an angel to descend from heaven,"[1] to exhort you to repentance and contrition for your sins; not even then would you be induced to do sincere penance, or to be really converted, if the word of God, which is far more impressive and powerful than other means, cannot influence you.

Proved from Sacred Scripture.

This is what Our Lord wishes us to understand by the parable in the Gospel of St. Luke. When the rich glutton, in the midst of the fearful torments he was suffering in hell, raised his eyes and beheld Lazarus, whom during life he had looked upon as if of less account than a dog, reposing in glory in Abraham's bosom, "Ah!" said he, "Father, I beseech thee that thou wouldst send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torments."[2] And what answer did Abraham make? "They have Moses and the Prophets," he said, "let them hear them;"[3] they will preach to them. But, "no," said the other; "No, Father Abraham; but if one went to them from the dead, they will do penance;"[4] it would have such an effect on them, that they would amend their lives. No, said Abraham, you are grievously mistaken; if the word of God, which the prophets preach to them, cannot convert them, much less could a dead man help them; and if your brothers do not care to listen to the prophets, they will have still less inclination to hear one from the dead. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."[5]

Confirmed by an example.

As a proof of this, my dear brethren, listen to a well-known and most remarkable instance that occurred in England. There was a certain young man, who, to the great scandal of the neighborhood, lived on terms of improper intimacy with a person of the opposite sex. His friends, both lay and clerical, frequently exhorted him to put away this person and to amend his life, lest he should lose his soul; but all their exhortations were of no avail: he remained obstinate in his wickedness. God, in His mercy, see-

[1] Etsi resurgat mortuus, etsi cœlitus descenderit angelus.

[2] Rogo ergo te, pater, ut mittas eum in domum patris mei; habeo enim quinque fratres ut testetur illis, ne et ipsi veniant in hunc locum tormentorum.—Luke xvi. 27, 28.

[3] Habent Moysen et prophetas; audiant illos.—Ibid. 29.

[4] Non, Pater Abraham: sed si quis ex mortuis ierit ad eos, pœnitentiam agent.—Ibid. 30.

[5] Si Moysen et prophetas non audiunt, neque, si quis ex mortuis resurrexerit, credent.—Ibid. 31.

ing that the living could not, with all their representations, induce him to repent, or make any impression on his heart, entrusted this office to the dead. His father, who had died some years previous, appeared to him one night. "Son," he said, in a terrible and impressive voice, "Son, give up your wicked ways! you are not acting on the instruction I gave you during my life. Be converted to God, and banish the object of your impure passion from your house, out of your sight and out of your heart, or else, woe to you!" Having spoken thus, he disappeared. The son was somewhat frightened at first, but he did not make the least effort to repent. The father appeared to him a second time, and repeated his former warning, adding that there was still time for grace, but that, if he deferred his conversion, an unhappy death was appointed for him by the divine justice; he should die suddenly on St. Martin's day and go at once into eternal torments. Who would not think that this threat, at all events, would induce the young man to open his eyes? But no such thing; he paid not the least attention to it, and continued on in sin as before. Nay, to show how little he thought of the threat, he prepared a grand entertainment for St. Martin's feast, and spent the day in feasting, carousing, and indulging his impure passion. On the following morning he was laughing with his boon companions at what he called his idle dreams. "See," he said, "I was to die on St. Martin's day, and here I am as well as ever I was in my life!" Hardly had he said those words, and as he was on the point of going to his paramour, he fell dead on the ground and that, too, on the feast of the holy Pope and Martyr, St. Martin, which immediately follows that of St. Martin, Confessor and Pontiff. Thus his father's threat was literally fulfilled. From this we can clearly see that, if one who is in the state of sin is so blinded by his passions and evil inclinations that he will not hear the word of God, or be moved by it to repentance, neither will he be induced to amend even if one were to rise from the grave to warn him. "Neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead."

The very neglect of the word of God is a divine punishment.

Sinner, if, in spite of your wicked life, you do not perhaps fear a sudden and unprovided death, yet you have reason to shudder when you think of another punishment that an angry God may have already inflicted on you for your sins. And what is that? your very negligence and carelessness about hearing sermons, or the fact that you hear them without amending your life; that is one of the severest punishments that can be

inflicted on your sins. Hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Behold I will send upon them the sword, and the famine, and I will persecute them with the sword and with famine; and I will give them up unto affliction to all the kingdoms of the earth; to be a curse, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach to all the nations." And why? what have they done? "Because they have not hearkened to My words, saith the Lord, which I sent to them by My servants, the prophets."[1] And what kind of a famine was God to inflict on them? He explains it by the Prophet Amos: "Behold the days come, saith the Lord; and I will send forth a famine into the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord."[2] They do not care for my word; they hardly deign to hear it, and therefore their punishment shall be that I will deprive them of all inclination and desire to hear it; they are not worthy of that spiritual food, and therefore they shall perish with hunger, and shall live and die in the unhappy state of sin. Certainly a most fearful punishment! exclaims the holy Pope, St. Gregory; "thus, by a hidden decree of God's Providence, His holy word is withdrawn from those who do not deserve to be aroused by grace to amend their lives."[3]

And a sign of the sinner's eternal damnation.

It is a punishment which presages eternal punishment hereafter in hell. Remarkable is the well-known simile in which Jesus Christ distinguishes between the elect and the reprobate: "And He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left."[4] Thus the sheep are a figure of the elect, and the goats of the reprobate. But the Prophet David, speaking of sinners, says: "They are laid in hell like sheep; death shall feed upon them."[5] And how can that be? If, according to the words of Our Lord, the sheep shall be on His right hand at the last day, how can the expression, "They are laid in hell like sheep," be justified? Yet, says St. Augustine, both those texts are true; all who belong to the true Church are sheep of

[1] Hæc dicit Dominus exercituum: Ecce mittam in eos gladium et famem . . . et persequar eos in gladio et in fame, et dabo eos in vexationem universis regnis terræ: in maledictionem, et in stuporem, et in sibilum, et in opprobrium cunctis gentibus. Eo quod non audierint verba mea, dicit Dominus, quæ misi ad eos per servos meos prophetas.—Jerem. xxix. 17–19.

[2] Ecce dies veniunt, dicit Dominus; et mittam famem in terram, non famem panis neque sitim aquæ, sed audiendi verbum Domini.—Amos viii. 11.

[3] Subtili ergo, occultoque judicio a quorumdam auribus prædicatio sancta subtrahitur, qui suscitari per gratiam non merentur.—St. Greg. hom. 4 in cap. 10 Matt.

[4] Statuet oves quidem a dextris suis, hædos autem a sinistris.—Matt. xxv. 33.

[5] Sicut oves in inferno positi sunt; mors depascet eos.—Ps. xlviii. 15

the fold of Jesus Christ, who says of Himself, "I am the good Shepherd;"[1] all who belong to My fold, are sheep; but all are not elect sheep. But how can we distinguish those who are chosen for heaven from those who are doomed to hell? They who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Shepherd, are the elect; "I know mine, and mine know me."[2] They on the other hand, that do not acknowledge Him, are reprobate sheep. But who are they that acknowledge Christ as their Shepherd? Our Lord Himself answers this question: "My sheep hear My voice,"[3] He says; and they will be placed on My right hand; they are the elect. Those who do not hear My voice, My word, are sheep indeed; but they are not My sheep; "they are laid in hell like sheep."

Shown by an example.

Amongst the number of the latter was that unhappy man of whom James de Vitry writes; he could never be persuaded to go to a sermon; what do I want with sermons? he would say; I can preach well enough for myself. At last he died, and his body was brought to the church to be buried. During the funeral office that, according to the custom of the Catholic Church, was held for the soul of the deceased man, all who were present suddenly saw to their great consternation the crucifix, that was placed at the head of the coffin, tear its hands out of the nails and stop both its ears with them. The priest, seeing this, turned to the people and said to them: you know well what this means; during his life this man neglected the word of God, and never went to a sermon, "and therefore God now closes His ears, so as not to hear the prayers we are offering for his soul."[4] It is clear enough, therefore, that his soul is in hell; there is no use in praying for him any more, nor shall his body be buried in consecrated ground; let it be buried out in the field. And so it was done.

Conclusion and resolution to hear the Word of God constantly.

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,"[5] said Christ, speaking of the seed of the word of God. I conclude with the same words, my dear brethren, "he that hath ears to hear," let him be diligent in hearing the word of God: for it is necessary for all men frequently to hear it, if they wish to save their souls. It is necessary for the innocent and the just, that they may be encouraged and strengthened to continue in the divine service,

[1] Ego sum pastor bonus.—John x. 14.
[2] Cognosco meas, et cognoscunt me meæ.—Ibid.
[3] Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—Ibid. 27.
[4] Propter quod Deus obduravit aures suas, ne audiat preces quas pro eo fundimus.
[5] Qui habet aures audiendi, audiat.—Matt. xiii. 9.

to abstain from sin, and always to belong to the number of those chosen sheep who hear the voice of their Shepherd. It is especially necessary for those who are actually in the state of sin, that they may be moved to repentance and amendment, unless they wish to be numbered among the reprobate sheep, who are rejected by the Shepherd and doomed to hell. Merciful God, save us from that terrible fate! We all who are here present declare that we desire to be together at Thy right hand, among Thy chosen sheep; and therefore we have met to-day to hear Thy voice, to learn Thy law, and to fulfil Thy holy will. We thank Thee, O God of goodness, that Thou hast given to us such frequent opportunities of hearing Thy word, in preference to so many people to whom the bread of life is broken but sparingly. We receive that word with the most heartfelt gratitude, and we shall be always ready to follow the light that Thou sheddest on us so abundantly. Nothing but absolute necessity shall prevent us from hearing Thy warning voice, so that we may one day, to our great joy, hear Thy sweet invitation to eternal bliss: Come, ye blessed of My Father, and follow Me into the eternal kingdom. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Invenerunt illum in templo, sedentem in medio doctorum, audientem illos, et interrogantem eos.—Luke ii. 46.

"They found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions."

Introduction.

Mark those words, my dear brethren. He who, to show His unheard of love to men, could not wait for the time of His bitter passion and death, when He was to shed the last drop of His Blood, but already as an Infant eight days old poured out the first drops of His precious Blood in the Circumcision; He would not wait for the time of His public mission to instruct and convert men, but commenced that office already in the twelfth year of His age, when He was found amongst the doctors in the temple, explaining the law to them by question and answer. Ah! dearest Saviour, if we had only the happiness of hearing Thy sermons and instructions but once; what an effect

would they not have on our hearts! But what am I saying? Although it is now nearly two thousand years since Thou didst appear in the world in visible form, yet Thou still preachest Thy divine word, and explainest Thy law by the mouths of Thy preachers and priests. Alas! I should rather exclaim, would that all Thy Christians were diligent enough in hearing Thy word! How much would not the just profit thereby for their salvation, as well as sinners for their conversion! I have elsewhere proved, my dear brethren—*continues as above.*

Several Sermons on the Necessity and Advantage of hearing the Word of God are contained in the preceding First and Second Parts, as well as in the following Fourth and Fifth Parts.

ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD EXCITE THE SINNER TO SPEEDY REPENTANCE.

SECOND SERMON.

ON THE VAIN LABOR OF THOSE WHO ARE IN THE STATE OF SIN.

Subject.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible, by true penance, while every one should be on his guard against falling into it.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Per totam noctem laborantes, nihil cepimus.—Luke v. 5.
"We have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

Introduction.

Fruitless labor is always painful. No matter what trouble one takes, one never regrets it as long as it is successful; but when all one's toil and labor come to nothing, then there is a bitter sense of disappointment. We see an example of that in the disciples in to-day's Gospel. "Let down your nets for a draught," said Our Lord to Simon. What is the use? answered the latter; "Master, we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing;" we are tired of it. How many there are in the world now, my dear brethren, who resemble those disappointed fishermen, who labor and take nothing! How many there are who, at the hour of death, looking back on their past lives, must give vent

to this fruitless complaint; I have lived now for thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, or seventy years; I have troubled myself about a great many things; I have had a great deal to suffer, and many difficulties to contend with, and now I see that it is all of little or no use to my soul; "We have taken nothing!" And how is that? Most people are like Martha; they are careful about many things; during their whole lives they are busied about temporal concerns, while they forget that one important business, of which Our Lord said to Martha, "But one thing is necessary,"[1] the last thing they think of is their immortal souls and eternal happiness. These people will have to say, "We have taken nothing." There are others, too, who, according to their own idea, labor for the kingdom of heaven, and perform many good works, but not those which their state of life binds them to perform; they too will have to say, "We have taken nothing." Again, there are numbers who try to do what God wishes them to do according to their state, but they have not a pure intention, they forget to labor for God. Ah, poor people that you are! when you go to rest at night, you may well cry out, "we have taken nothing." Finally, there are some who perform many good works, but they labor during the night, that is to say, in the state of mortal sin; their lot is deserving of the greatest commiseration, for they take absolutely nothing; their labor is utterly useless. I shall speak to-day of those latter alone, since they are represented in the Gospel, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He who labors during the night, that is to say, while he is in the state of mortal sin, gains nothing by all the good works he performs, by all the trials he endures; therefore the state of sin is an unhappy and a miserable one, and he who is in that state should free himself from it as soon as possible by true penance, while all of us should be constantly on our guard against falling into it. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

May the great God enlighten our understandings to acknowledge the truth now proposed for our consideration, and excite our wills to follow and adhere strictly to the conclusion to be derived from it; this we ask through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels, that we may not hereafter have to complain that we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing.

[1] Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 42.

It does not require much argument to show that by the night, in a moral sense, is meant the time during which a soul is in the state of sin. No comparison is more frequently used than this by the Holy Scripture, and by the fathers of the Church, when they speak of sin and sinners. "What is the life of a sinner," asks St. Gregory, "but a night,"[1] from which, as soon as sin is consented to, the sun of justice is withdrawn, even in the day-time, and the light of the soul, sanctifying grace, disappears? "Let us therefore," is the exhortation of St. Paul to the Romans, "cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light;"[2] the "night is past, and the day is at hand."[3] "For you were heretofore darkness;" he writes to his Ephesian converts, "but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light; and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness."[4] And just as during the night, when no light is shining, and when all things are hidden from the eyes of men, no matter what signs or gestures one makes, no one can pay any attention to them, so that it is the time for thieves and robbers to ply their trade, which courts the darkness; so, if your soul is in the spiritual night of sin, all your good works, no matter how excellent they may be in themselves, will be passed over unnoticed by God, although He is present everywhere.

God does not regard good works that are performed in the state of sin.

And is there, then, a night so dark that the eye of God cannot penetrate it, or that it can conceal anything from Him? No! says the Prophet David; be on your guard, O sinners, for even in the dark, in the gloomiest corner, the omnipresent God sees all the abominations you commit: "Darkness shall not be dark to Thee, and night shall be light as the day."[5] If I were to hide myself in the bowels of the earth, or in the darkest corner of hell, even there Thou art present, O my God; even there Thy all-seeing eye would behold me! "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art there."[6] But God does not regard the good works of the sinner, because, since they are performed by one who is unworthy, on account of the state in which he is, they do not deserve to be

Because they are performed by one who is unworthy.

[1] Quid est peccatoris vita, nisi nox?

[2] Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis.—Rom. xiii. 12.

[3] Nox præcessit, dies autem appropinquavit.—Ibid.

[4] Eratis enim aliquando tenebræ, nunc autem lux in Domino; ut filii lucis ambulate. . et nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum.—Ephes. v. 8, 11.

[5] Tenebræ non obscurabuntur a te, et nox sicut dies illuminabitur.—Ps. cxxxviii. 12.

[6] Quo ibo a spiritu tuo, et quo a facie tua fugiam? Si ascendero in cœlum, tu illic es, si descendero in infernum, ades.—Ibid. 7, 8.

looked on favorably by the Lord of holiness. For God does not regard the work itself so much as the disposition of him who performs it; He does not value the gift, but rather the hand that bestows it. We have an example of this in the Book of Genesis, in the two brothers Cain and Abel. Cain offered sacrifice to God, and Abel did the same; but how differently their offerings were received! "The Lord had respect to Abel and to his offerings," says the Holy Scripture; but to "Cain and his offerings he had no respect;"[1] if as they did not concern Him in the least. What was the reason of the difference? Abel was just and innocent; Cain was unjust and wicked; the one offered with a good, the other with a bad intention. "Abel," says St. Gregory, "was not made pleasing by his gifts, but Abel himself made the gift pleasing in the sight of God."[2] And on the other hand, God did not reject Cain on account of his gifts, but the gifts on account of Cain.

Who is altogether hateful in the sight of God.

Nor is this to be wondered at, my dear brethren, for men act on the same principle every day. Let the most dainty food be served up in a dirty dish, and you would turn away from it in disgust. And why? the food is very good? Yes; but it ought to be served in cleaner fashion. If there is one whom you dislike, either naturally, or because he has insulted you and given you just cause for anger, no matter what he does, he will never please you; you put a bad construction on his best acts, and you cannot even bear to hear him well spoken of. But who can adequately describe the bitter hatred, the aversion and disgust, with which the God of all holiness looks on the accursed and odious person of one who is in the state of sin? It is true that of Himself He is a God of infinite goodness and love, who looks upon with fervor and loves even the meanest things He has created. "For Thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which Thou hast made."[3] But the sinner alone He has excluded from His work, He cannot bear the sight of him, but pursues him with the bitterest hatred, although in His infinite mercy He leaves him still in life, in the hope that he will repent. "Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity," says the prophet David to God, and that so bitterly that they dare not appear before Thee: "Neither

[1] Respexit Dominus ad Abel et ad munera ejus; ad Cain vero et ad munera illius non respexit.—Gen. iv. 4–5.

[2] Non Abel ex muneribus, sed ex Abel munera placuerunt.—St. Greg. in Job, l. 22, c. 8.

[3] Diligis enim omnia quæ sunt, et nihil odisti eorum quæ fecisti.—Sap. xi. 25.

shall the wicked dwell near Thee; nor shall the unjust abide before Thy eyes."[1]

The intensity of the hatred with which God regards the sinner appears from its effects.

Do you wish, my dear brethren, to see a proof of the intensity of this hatred from it effects? Then imagine a soul that has lived for hundreds of years in the greatest innocence and sanctity; if it consents but in thought to a single mortal sin, in a moment the God of infinite goodness, in spite of that soul's long-continued service, and of the painful death by which He so superabundantly atoned for that same sin, will forget all its former good works and all the treasures of merit it had accumulated. Hear what He says Himself by the prophet Ezechiel: "But if the just man turn himself away from his justice, and do iniquity," what shall befall him? "all his justices, which he had done, shall not be remembered."[2] Is not this a mark of bitter hatred and displeasure against the sinner? To understand this still more clearly, descend in thought into the fiery prison of hell, and see there a soul condemned to burn in eternal flames, without hope of alleviation or release, for having consented to a single sinful thought. Who has condemned that soul to such a punishment? The God of infinite mercy and justice. Through all eternity He will see that soul, which He created to His own image and redeemed by His precious Blood, tortured by demons. He will hear its howlings and lamentings without being in the least moved to pity. Oh, certainly a most implacable hatred! Terrible it is to read what Louis of Blois says (but before I quote him, I must crave thy permission, O holiest of all creatures, dearest Mother Mary! I know well that thou hast never been guilty of the least fault. I rejoice and congratulate thee from my heart that, humanly speaking, it was impossible for thee to consent to a sin): "If the Mother of God, the most Blessed Virgin, had committed a mortal sin and had died without being truly very sorrow for it, she would never have gone to heaven, but would be tortured eternally amongst the demons in hell."[3] O just God, is Thy hatred of the sinner so great that Thou wouldst have cursed and cast off from Thee, into eternal fire. Thy own beloved Mother, on account of one mortal sin, if it had been possible for her to com-

[1] Odisti omnes, qui operantur iniquitatem. Neque habitabit juxta te malignus; neque permanebunt injusti ante oculos tuos.—Ps. v. 7, 6.

[2] Si autem averterit se justus a justitia sua, et fecerit iniquitatem, omnes justitiæ ejus, quas fecerat, non recordabuntur.—Ezech. xviii. 24.

[3] Si Mater Christi Domini Virgo Beatissima peccasset mortaliter, et sine contritione mortua esset: cœlum nunquam obtinuisset, sed cum dæmonibus in inferno cruciaretur.

mit it? How great, then, must it not be towards me and others, if we are actually in the deplorable state of sin! Consider now, my dear brethren, whether one who is so hateful to God can do anything pleasing to Him or can have any merit in His sight, whatever good works he performs. No; no matter what good is done, as long as it is done in the night, that is, in the state of sin, it will be of no value; and they who are in that state will ever have reason to say, "we have labored all the night, and have taken nothing."

Because such works are unworthy in themselves.

But supposing even that the person of the sinner were not so hateful and displeasing in the sight of God, and, as a matter of fact, the good God in His endless mercy and, so to speak, in spite of His anger and displeasure, often displays the greatest patience in bearing with the most wicked sinners for years, and in waiting for them to repent, while He never ceases showering down upon them temporal blessings and visiting them with His inspirations and graces, as if He could not help loving them still; yet the works of those sinners, no matter how praiseworthy they may be in themselves, have not the least supernatural merit in the sight of God, because they are performed "in the night." On a dark night, when you have no light, place on one side of you a piece of precious gold, and on the other a lump of clay; or put on one side a beautiful statue, on the other the image of a hideous demon, and tell me which of the two you prefer, which you consider the more beautiful. If you consult your eyes alone, you cannot distinguish either the value or the beauty of the different objects, because it is night, and everything seems black to you.

As the least good works done in the state of grace are precious in the sight of God.

Oh, how precious, how indescribably beautiful in the sight of God, are the good works of him who is in the clear day, that is in the state of sanctifying grace! what great treasures they amass! A single sigh sent forth to God by such a man, a bit of bread, a drink of cold water that he gives to the poor, each step he takes, every movement of his hands, every blow of his hammer, every use that he makes of the different implements of his trade, nay every mouthful of food he takes, although he enjoys it, provided all this is done with a supernatural intention for God's sake, how valuable is it not in Thy sight, O Lord! No matter how trivial and worthless each of those actions is in itself, yet it merits an eternity of glory in heaven, which the just Judge will give him who performs it, if he dies in the state of grace. Amen, I say to you, such is the solemn asseveration of

Our Lord Himself: "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."[1] If in one side of the balance would be placed all the great and heroic deeds of the greatest generals, kings, and emperors, as they have been handed down to us in history, from the beginning of the world, would they not make a great weight indeed? What wonder and admiration they still excite in us, when we hear or read of them! But place in the other scale a single "Our Father," said by some poor woman with proper devotion, or a five minutes' work that the ignorant ploughman offers to God, or the little trouble that the housemaid has in sweeping out a room; oh, how quickly will it not weigh down, in the sight of God, all the greatest deeds of the most illustrious men! All those great exploits which excite the wonder of the world, when compared to a single good work of one who is in the state of grace, resemble the labor of a fly in comparison to the celebrated tower of Babel; because, great as those exploits are, they do not exceed the limits of nature, while the good works of the just man are supernatural and, being united with the works of Jesus Christ, are pleasing to the God of infinite greatness, and deserve an eternity of happiness. O truly happy state of the just soul! what treasures and riches it can accumulate in a day, an hour, nay at every moment! O ye poor peasants, laborers, and servants, and all ye to whom Divine Providence has allotted either hard work, or trials and crosses, ah, see above all that you are in the state of grace, and do not forget the good intention! How rich you are! What an exceeding great reward is in store for that seemingly worthless labor of yours!

So the greatest works performed in the state of sin are worth nothing before God.

But miserable, indeed, is your soul, O sinner, since you labor in the night! All your undertakings are black, and useless, and unprofitable! Suppose that to-day or yesterday you have committed a grievous sin in thought; say that you remain in that sin for the next six months without confession and without true sorrow for it, although you have the intention of confessing it hereafter, and you commit no other sin during that time, while you live in other respects a Christian life: you go to church and hear Mass every day devoutly; you observe the appointed fasts; you give alms to the poor; you labor and work according to your condition with a good intention, because God requires you

[1] "Quicumque potum dederit uni ex minimis istis calicem aquæ frigidæ tantum in nomine discipuli; amen dico vobis, non perdet mercedem suam.—Matt. x. 42.

to do so; you bear many a cross, and difficulty, and contradiction with Christian patience, contentment, and resignation to the divine will; nay more, suppose that you give all you have to the poor, that you practise every imaginable work of Christian charity, that you fast continually and scourge yourself daily even to blood, that you beat your breast with a stone, like St. Jerome, that you go through India and Japan like St. Francis Xavier and convert 1,200,000 souls, that you bear with the greatest patience and meekness all kinds of persecutions, sickness, poverty, hunger, and the most fearful torments, like the martyrs of Christ; when you have done all that, look back upon it in thought, and see what you have gained, what you have merited by it. Perhaps you will think that you have done wonders, and will say, like him whom St. John reproves in the Apocalypse, "I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing," but I am sorry for you, because "thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;" [1] you are just as badly off as you were when you began.

Thus the sinner labors in vain without merit.

Hear what St. Paul says: "If I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." [2] That is to say, without sanctifying grace all these gifts and good works are of no avail. You have certainly made great strides with those good works of yours, but not on the right road; you have tired yourself running in a circle, but you have approached no nearer to the goal. "Your soul," as St. Basil says, "is like a bee hive, in which there is no honey, and in which none can be made." By your good works, you have gained no more for heaven, than one who pays a large sum of money in a lottery, hoping to win something, and draws nothing but blanks. You have borne with many trials and contradictions, but not otherwise than a heavily laden beast of burden, that is urged on during the day with blows, and, in the evening, is turned into a comfortless stable. "They are not in the labor of men," [3] says the Prophet David. They labor like the dumb animal; they bear their cross, they suffer hunger, and

[1] Dicis, quod dives sum et locupletatus, et nullius egeo, et nescis quia tu es miser et miserabilis, et pauper, et cæcus, et nudus.—Apoc. iii. 17.

[2] Et si habuero omnem fidem, ita ut montes transferam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil sum; et si distribuero in cibos pauperum omnes facultates meas, et si tradidero corpus meum ita ut ardeam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil mihi prodest.—I. Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

[3] In labore hominum non sunt.—Ps. lxxii. 5.

want, and misery, caused by themselves or by others: whether they bear them patiently or not, they have no consolation from God, no merit for eternity, and at night they retire to rest with their miserable souls crushed under the yoke of the devil. In a word, you have nothing left, but to sigh like the disciples: "We have labored all the night and have taken nothing." because you have not sanctifying grace, which is necessary to give good works their life, their beauty, and their value. Such is the general teaching of theologians, taken from Holy Scripture.

What a miserable and deplorable state!

Oh! truly unhappy is the state of the sinner! He labors and gains nothing! The bare thought of this is enough to make me weep burning tears of pity! When I see a man working hard for his daily bread, or a beggar stretching out his hands for an alms, a sick man lying on a bed of suffering, a destitute man bewailing his misery, or an unfortunate man oppressed with crosses and trials; oh! I think, if he is only in the state of grace, he enjoys consolation from God, he has the peace of a good conscience, and he can expect a reward in heaven for all his sufferings; at least he need only offer them to God with a pure intention, in order to gain the reward, But if he is in the night, if he has lost sanctifying grace by one mortal sin, alas for his poor soul! All his labors and trouble are fruitless. "Write this man barren," I say of him, as God said of King Jechonias to the Prophet Jeremias. But why? Jechonias had still eight sons living; how could he then be looked on as barren? God Himself gives the reason: "For there shall not be a man of his seed that shall sit upon the throne of David, and have power any more in Juda."[1] Therefore write him barren. The same is true of the sinner; in spite of the superabundance of his good works and all his labor and trouble, he remains barren, because not one of his works will ever reach the throne of God. You may see from this, my dear brethren, in what a gloomy and horrible night sin encamps the human soul, by taking away from the holiest and most praiseworthy acts of virtue, and from the otherwise most meritorious trials, all their beauty, worth, and reward.

And all the more so because such good works can never revive, so as to become meritorious.

And there is another circumstance which makes this night far more terrible than our natural night. For although the latter hides the beauty and value of objects from the eye, yet, no matter how black the darkness, it cannot interfere with the essential

[1] Scribe virum istum sterilem; nec enim erit de semine ejus vir, qui sedeat super solium David, et potestatem habeat ultra in Juda.—Jerem. xxii. 30.

value or splendor of anything; it leaves everything unaltered, so that, when the day comes, objects are seen in their proper colors, the gold glitters as usual, beauty shows itself in its splendor as before. But it is far worse with the night of sin; for even after it is driven away and sanctifying grace restored to the soul by penance, the good works performed in the state of sin remain just as black as before, without merit and without reward, which they can never expect for all eternity.

Shown by a figure from Holy Scripture.

I find in the Old Testament a striking figure of what occurs in the soul of a sinner. According to divine command, if a Hebrew were bought as a slave, his purchaser was bound to give him his freedom after seven years: "If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years shall he serve thee; in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing."[1] And, besides that, if he had a wife and children when he became a slave, they too were to be freed with him at the appointed time, and he was to receive the same kind of clothing as that he originally had. "With what raiment he came in, with the like let him go out; if having a wife, his wife also shall go out with him."[2] But if he had married and had children during the first six years of his slavery, he, indeed, was to be freed in the seventh year, but his wife and children had to remain in slavery. "But if his master gave him a wife, and she hath borne sons and daughters, the woman and her children shall be her master's: but he himself shall go out with his raiment."[3] Do you see what is meant by this figure, my dear brethren? By baptism man is endowed with the freedom of the children of God; but when he commits mortal sin, he sells himself of his own accord as a slave to the devil, and God says by the prophet Isaias: "Behold, you are sold for your iniquities."[4] Now the good God has given him a means of freeing himself from this slavery; not merely after six years, but in any year, at any moment that he wishes, as soon as he truly repents, he will be set at liberty, as the Apostle says: she "shall be delivered from the servitude of corruption, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God."[5] But how? What will he take back with him when he is restored to freedom? His children, that is

[1] Si emeris servum Hebræum, sex annis serviet tibi, in septimo egredietur liber gratis.—Exod. xxi. 2.

[2] Cum quali veste intraverit, cum tali exeat; si habens uxorem, et uxor egredietur simul.—Ibid. 3.

[3] Sin autem dominus dederit illi uxorem, et pepererit filios et filias; mulier et liberi ejus erunt domini sui, ipse vero exibit cum vestitu suo.—Ibid. 4.

[4] Ecce in iniquitatibus vestris venditi estis.—Isa. l. 1.

[5] Liberabitur a servitute corruptionis, in libertatem gloriæ filiorum Dei.—Rom. viii. 21.

to say, the good works he performed before he lost the state of grace, and which were brought by him into slavery, so that during that time he could receive no reward for them; but, according to the general teaching of theologians, when he has truly repented, those works revive and are freed with him, clad in their former garment of sanctifying grace, like the children that the Hebrew slave had before losing his liberty. On the other hand, all the works performed in the state of sin remain behind; they do not revive; they are and must remain without merit or hope of reward. The labor they entailed is profitless, because they were performed in slavery, in the night of sin; and therefore it still remains true of them, "we have labored all the night and have taken nothing."

The sinner must not therefore cease doing good.

What are we to infer from this, my dear brethren? That there is no use in doing good when we are in the state of sin? Oh, if that is so, one might say: as I have a mortal sin on my conscience, which I intend to repent of and confess hereafter, I can meanwhile give up praying, hearing Mass, giving alms, and visiting the church. If I cannot merit anything by those works of devotion, why should I trouble myself with them? I do not see the good of working to no purpose. Your argument, O sinner, is a very bad one; you say that, since you cannot do anything deserving of heaven, you will cease doing good altogether. But for that very reason you should be all the more diligent in doing good works. Suppose you have a piece of money that is broken into two parts, would you throw the pieces away? Not by any means! But what are they good for? they are no longer current coin. True, but the pieces are still worth something, and if I bring them to a silversmith he will give me a price for them. And so it is, due proportion being observed, with the good works you perform in the night of sin. They are not indeed current coin with which you can purchase heaven; they are broken and destroyed; but still they are good for something. And for what?

That he may be accustomed to do good.

St. Thomas of Aquin tells us. "Works of this kind," he says, "have a threefold utility: they accustom us to do good, they are a means of obtaining temporal blessings, and they dispose the soul to receive grace."[1] I will say nothing now of the temporal blessings, for they are of the least importance. They serve, then, first, to accustom one to good works. Why do sol-

[1] Opera ista ad triplex bonum valent: scilicet ad assuefactionem bonorum operum, ad temporalium consecutionem, et ad dispositionem ad gratiam.—St. Thom. in addit., q. 14, a. 4.

diers in time of peace, when there is not an enemy near them, have to practise military exercises so often, to engage in sham fights, and to practise shooting and the management of their weapons, not otherwise than if they were engaged in real warfare? Why do hunters so often shoot at a target, although they know that they will not kill any game by the shot, and that at best they can hit only a piece of paper? Is not the labor fruitless in both those cases? By no means; practice of that kind serves to make the soldier expert in war, and the hunter in the chase; it enables the former to grapple with his enemy as soon as he sees him, and the latter to make sure of his aim, so as to secure the spoils of the chase. In the same way, O sinner, the practice of good works will be of use to you, although you are actually in the state of sin. In so far your labor is fruitless, that you will never attain your end thereby; but it gives you a good habit, a certain expertness in doing the same virtuous actions afterwards, when you are reconciled with God, and when they will be really meritorious of eternal life.

To avoid the divine vengeance, and to obtain the grace of repentance more speedily.

In the second place, works of this kind dispose your soul to receive the grace of God, and avert the divine anger from you for a time, so that you are not, as you deserve, punished with a sudden death and condemned at once to eternal torments. Do you know what that Roman general did when, having lost a great number of his men, he was again attacked by the enemy? He made a rampart of the dead bodies, and was thus enabled to fight with the remainder of his army so as to avoid a total defeat. So should you also act, O sinner! The good works that you perform in the state of sin are but the dead bodies of virtues; yet they can serve as a rampart to shield you from the wrath of God, and to preserve you from a fresh attack of Satan, until you are enabled to take to flight by true penance. And in virtue of this humble acknowledgment of His claims on you, God in His mercy will keep you from further temptations, that you may not fall into greater sins, and finally become obdurate, and He will give you more powerful inspirations, illuminations, impulses, and better opportunities for conversion, so that you may recover His grace.

Shown by an example.

As an instance of this, listen to the following example taken from the Annals of the Capuchin Order. When the celebrated preacher, Father Matthew de Pascio, Founder of that Order in the city of Venice, was at the height of his fame for sanctity, a certain learned man, wishing to make the acquaintance of the

servant of God, invited him to table. There was in the house an ape that could wait at table, and clean the plates and glasses so well, that there were few servants who could excel it. When its master came home the ape would open the door for him, take charge of his hat and cloak, pull off his shoes, and, in a word, serve him with the utmost diligence. When Father Matthew heard of the wonderful ape, he asked to see it, but the ape, when it heard the Father coming, crept under a bed, and could not be induced to come out, either by blows or coaxing. Then the servant of God took by the hand the man who had invited him. "Do you know," said he, "what kind of an ape you have in your house? Come with me, and you will hear it out of its own mouth." He then commanded the supposed ape in the name of Jesus Christ to declare who he was, and why he consented to perform such abject services. "I am the devil," answered the ape in an angry tone, "and my only object in coming here is to carry off the soul of that man, which is already mine on several titles." "And why," asked the holy man, "have you not done so during the many years that you have performed menial offices for him?" "Because," was the answer, "he was accustomed to say a few devout prayers to God and to the Blessed Virgin every night, and if he had omitted doing so but once, I had power from the Creator to strangle him, and carry him off with me to hell." The Father then banished the evil spirit and persuaded the man, who was more dead than alive through fright, to repent at once and to make restitution of some property he had unjustly acquired. See from this, O sinner, whether the good works performed in the state of sin are altogether useless. What would have become of that man's soul if he had used the same foolish reasoning as you do, and said: Why should I trouble myself about prayer? as long as I am in this state I can do nothing for heaven; I will give up praying and all other good works.

Therefore the sinner must see how foolish it is to commit sin.

You should change your way of thinking, therefore, and if you wish to be reasonable, say rather: In the state in which I now am I cannot merit heaven by any good works; I must be mad and foolish, then, wilfully to bury my soul in this hideous darkness for the sake of a bad thought, a scandalous word, an impure look, a mere animal pleasure, that lasts but a moment; like the spendthrift tradesman that sells all the implements of his craft, so that he cannot work at his trade to support himself. Do I not act far more foolishly when I commit sin? For I have

thereby lost all the spiritual treasures that I had accumulated, and at the same time have deprived myself of all means of meriting.

And free himself at once from that state by repentance.

I am now laboring during the night and to no purpose. I must, then, at once free myself from my sins, and regain the clear light of grace. I will sincerely repent of and confess my sins. I will not defer repentance any longer, nor wait till next Easter, or the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nay, not even till this evening. For why should I hear Mass so often on Sundays and holydays, mortify myself so frequently by fasting, and bear with so many crosses and trials, and yet gain no reward by it all? Since I can merit eternal glory in heaven every moment of this very day, will I neglect doing so, determined as I am some time or other to do penance? No, I will at once get rid of the heavy burden of my sins, and come forth out of this terrible darkness.

And never fall into it again.

And when you have once freed yourself from your sins, rejoice with all your heart, thank the divine mercy, and make this irrevocable resolution (hear all ye pious and just souls! this does not concern you): In future I will be on my guard against nothing so much as sin, which envelops the soul in such a gloomy night; I will avoid the occasions that may lead me into it; I will not go near that house, that person, that company, which has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin to me; I will destroy that book, that picture, which has been a stumbling-block to me; I will keep a guard on my heart, my eyes, ears, tongue, and all my senses, by which I have so often sinned; every morning I will renew my resolution, and will earnestly and humbly beg of God to help me in temptations, and to keep me from sin. I will be diligent in looking after my children and servants, so as to keep them from the danger of sin, and I will perform all my works with a good intention for God's sake in order that, as I am now in the state of grace, not the least of them may be unrewarded. Let this, then, my dear brethren, be your final resolution; be faithful to it until death. Rather death than sin! According to the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus, "Have pity on thy own soul, pleasing God."[1] If you have no reverence for the great God, who is present everywhere, who sees everything you do, and whom you insult and offend; if the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, which you trample underfoot, can make no impression on your heart; if you feel no compassion for your loving Saviour, whose death, as the Apostle says, you renew by every mortal sin

[1] Miserere animæ tuæ placens Deo.—Ecclus. xxx. 24.

you commit; if you have no regard for your guardian angel, whom you sadden, and, as it were, drive away from you whenever you offend God; then at least have pity on your own soul, which you injure so grievously, so irretrievably, and for eternity, by bringing it into the night of sin. Be faithful, then, to your resolution; rather death than sin! O Almighty God of infinite goodness, give to me and all present the powerful help of Thy grace, that we may keep this resolution to the end of our lives. Amen.

THIRD SERMON.

ON THE INJURIOUS TREATMENT OF WHICH THE SINNER WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE IS GUILTY TOWARDS GOD.

Subject.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is to treat most injuriously the good God who invites us again to return to Him.—*Preached on the second Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Cœperunt simul omnes excusare.—Luke xiv. 18.
"And they began all at once to make excuse."

Introduction.

They must have been very unmannerly and uncourteous people who, being invited in such a friendly way to a magnificent banquet, paid no attention to the invitation. Enraged at their conduct, he who invited them excluded them forever from his table. "But I say unto you, that none of those men that were invited shall taste of my supper." Do not most men, my dear brethren, act in the same way towards their Lord and God? He invites us to His Supper, in which He gives us His own Flesh and Blood as our food and drink; and yet, how many there are who make excuses and despise that Precious Banquet by going but seldom to holy Communion? He invites us to the heavenly marriage-feast, that we may share in all imaginable joys with Him forever; but how many there are who excuse themselves and refuse to come, because they prefer to indulge in forbidden

pleasures and to satisfy themselves with the husks of swine, and thus renounce all right to heaven. He still daily invites sinners, his hated and sworn enemies, to His grace and friendship. He calls upon them to be converted and do penance, and promises that He will readily forgive them everything, so that they may not be excluded from His heavenly marriage-feast; but how many there are who make excuses, and reject the proffered grace by constantly deferring repentance and conversion, by putting off, to some indefinite time, the Lord who invites them in such a friendly manner, and by saying always, by way of answer, I will come, but not now: later on; I will do penance and be converted, but not immediately; at some other time! An insulting and injurious treatment, than which none worse can be imagined. This I undertake to prove to-day; and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

To intend to do penance and be converted, not now, but later on, is a great injustice towards the good God, who invites us again to return to Him. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Christ Jesus! who hast said that Thou camest, not to call the just, but sinners, call out to-day with Thy powerful and penetrating voice to my heart and to the hearts of all sinners, that we may be attentive to Thy invitation, and may be converted to Thee at once! Prostrate at Thy feet, we beg this of Thee through the merit of Thy dearest Mother Mary, and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, that none of us may be amongst the number of those uncourteous guests who, "began all at once to make excuse."

Not to receive at once the grace and pardon offered by a great lord whom you have offended, is to treat him most injuriously.

If one of your equals, nay, one of inferior condition to you, who has offended and insulted you, were to come to you, and earnestly and humbly to implore your pardon; would you refuse to listen to him, turn your back on him, and shut the door in his face? If you did so, you would act very wrongly, and in direct opposition to the Christian law. For Christ our Saviour most earnestly and emphatically commands us to return good for evil, and instead of seeking revenge, to behave towards our worst enemies with meekness, friendliness, and charity, nay, even, as He says in the Gospel of St. Matthew, to be the first to ask pardon: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee: leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be

reconciled to thy brother."[1] Mark those words; you must go to him yourself, and at once, and leave your offering until you are reconciled to your brother. And would it not be far worse for you to refuse to lay aside your hatred and enmity against one whom you have grossly offended, and who now humbly begs to be restored to your friendship? But if a great lord or prince, who is not at all in need of you, who has little to gain from your friendship, and nothing to fear from your enmity, and on whose favor you depend for your very livelihood; if he, I say, after having been offended by you, should, through sheer goodness and pity, either in his own person, or by an authorized ambassador, offer you full pardon and forgiveness, begging you at the same time to accept his offer at once; would you obstinately turn your back on him, and say that it does not suit you now to regain his friendship, that you do not want it yet, and that he must come some other time? Where is the child, with the least glimmer of reason, who will not condemn such conduct as most injurious?

He who invites the sinner to His friendship is God.

Now, O sinner, look at the matter reasonably! Who is He who comes to you, calls and invites you, wishing to be reconciled to you and to be your friend again? Is He your prince and sovereign? Oh, if He were, how you would bow and scrape before Him! you certainly would not remain seated in His presence if He came to you; you would not even wait His coming, but would run out to meet Him, and in every possible way try to ingratiate yourself into His favor. But He is an infinitely greater Lord than your prince; before Him all the kings and emperors of earth, as well as the poorest beggar and simplest peasant, must bend the knee, and humbly beg of Him their daily bread. In a word, since we are unable to express His might and magnificence, He is the infinitely great God Himself, before whose Majesty the angels in heaven, the devils in hell, and all creatures on and under the earth tremble with reverence; whose calls and invitations even lifeless elements must obey; who makes a sign to the stars, and they are ready to do His bidding, as the Prophet Baruch says: "He that sendeth forth light, and it goeth; and hath called it, and it obeyeth Him with trembling. And the stars have given light in their watches, and rejoiced; they were called, and they said, here

[1] Si ergo offers munus tuum ad altare, et ibi recordatus fueris, quia frater tuus habet aliquid adversum te: relinque ibi munus tuum ante altare, et vade prius reconciliari fratri tuo.—Matt. v. 23, 24.

we are; and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him that made them. This is our God, and there shall no other be accounted of in comparison of Him;"[1] who says to the raging sea: "Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further, and here thou shalt break thy swelling waves;"[2] nor dare it in the least disobey the voice of its Creator, who ever, according to St. Paul, calls to the things that are not. He "calleth those things that are not, as those that are;"[3] and at the sound of His voice creatures come forth out of nothing. This great Lord and God deigns to speak to you, O man, O miserable worm of the earth! He offers you His favor, grace, and friendship, which you have forfeited forever, and do you still hesitate to accept His offer? Is it not yet convenient for you to hearken to His invitation? Do you still say to Him: "Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give to Thee,"[4] I do not wish to be your friend to-day?

Who has been first offended by the sinner.

And what has He then done to you? Has He perhaps hurt or injured you, so that you think you have just reason for rejecting His proffered friendship, and deferring to be reconciled to Him? What harm has He done you? Harm! What good things do you possess that this generous God has not freely given you? Are you not, from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot, a proof of His liberality and bounty? Consider everything you have; from whom have you received it, if not from God? That you are, that you live, that you see, hear, feel, walk, stand, sit; for all that you have to thank Him most humbly. What reason, then, have you to be angry with Him any longer? But what am I saying? Angry with Him! It is God who has first been offended by you! "Behold," cries out St. Gregory in astonishment, "Behold, He Whom we have despised, calls us."[5] He it is whose commands you have neglected, whose blood you have trampled under foot, whom you have time after time offended, insulted, despised, for such a miserable thing as your worthless vanity, for a breath of honor, for a wretched piece of money, for a brutal lust, for the sake of grat

[1] Qui emittit lumen, et vadit; et vocavit illud, et obedit illi in tremore. Stellæ autem dederunt lumen in custodiis suis, et lætatæ sunt; vocatæ sunt, et dixerunt, adsumus: et luxerunt ei cum jucunditate, qui fecit illas. Hic est Deus noster, et non æstimabitur alius adversus eum.—Baruch iii. 33-35.

[2] Usque huc venies, et non procedes amplius, et hic confringes tumentes fluctus tuos.—Job xxxviii. 11.

[3] Vocat ea, quæ non sunt, tamquam ea, quæ sunt.—Rom. iv. 17.

[4] Vade et revertere; cras dabo tibi.—Prov. iii. 28.

[5] Ecce ipse quem despeximus vocat nos.—St. Greg. hom. 43 in Evang.

ifying your anger and vindictiveness, or of indulging in gluttony and drunkenness, or for fear of displeasing, or for the sake of pleasing men through human respect: "He it is whom we have despised!" And He whom you have treated so insultingly, and who, therefore, has just cause to reject you, to call out to you in a far different voice, to send down fire from heaven on you, to smite you with His thunderbolts, and to call upon the demons of hell and all the creatures on earth to take vengeance on you at this very moment, He it is Who calls you to repentance! He, the great God, who was first offended by you, (O ye angels, what did you think of me, when I dared even to deliberate with myself as to whether I should offend this great God?) He who has been so often offended by you, calls you! (O angels, still more reason have you to wonder at this!) He is the first to come to you and to invite you to return to Him! And for what object? What will he do with you? If you saw at a distance a man whom you have treated as shamefully as you have your God you would tremble with fear, and try to avoid him, and with reason, too, for you would have just cause to fear his vengeance.

And this too He does, as it were, suppliantly.

But your God, whom you have thus offended, comes to you, (do not fear, O sinner; do not run away from Him!) not to punish and condemn you as you deserve, but to invite you to return to His grace and friendship, and that He does with as much earnestness and patience, nay, even humility, as if He were in need of your favor. He seeks you out in His own person; He begs of you to return to Him by His servants, whom He has commissioned for that purpose, as St. Paul says: "For Christ, therefore, we are embassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."[1] We beg and implore of you, oh, be converted now to God! He comes Himself and makes the same request of you. What else is the meaning of those good inspirations, those salutary thoughts? Why else is this life a vale of tears? Why does death await you, O sinner, and you know not when it will come? Why must you appear before a most strict judge at the very moment after death? Why is your conscience torn by remorse day and night, knowing, as you do, that you are in such a miserable state that, if death surprised you, you would be hurled into hell? What is the meaning of those inefficacious desires by which you

[1] Pro Christo ergo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.— II. Cor. v. 20.

wish to be like the good and pious, and to enjoy peace of conscience? What is all this, but the voice of God calling on you to repent? "Behold I stand at the gate, and knock; if any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the door, I will come in to him."[1] As Rupert remarks on those words, is not that to stand at the door, like a beggar who asks an alms of a rich man?[2] You know, my dear brethren, how a poor man acts at the door of a rich miser. He knocks and begs for a piece of bread; but he has to ask two or three times before he gets an answer. Does the poor man go away then? Oh, no; he remains at the door, and cries out, in more imploring tones, "give me a piece of bread, for God's sake!" And at last he gets the usual pitiless answer: "I have nothing for you." What does he do then? He does not yet despair; he repeats his request, and although he has been told that there is nothing for him, he still waits and hopes that his very importunity will gain for him what he could not get through Christian charity. In the same way does the merciful God act at the door of the sinner's heart. He knocks over and over again, and although He gets no answer, He does not turn away. "I called, I stretched out My hand;"[3] I am still calling and entreating you! And what wilt Thou have, O my God? Be reconciled to Me; give Me back your heart, which you have withdrawn from Me, and fixed upon creatures; lay aside the hatred and anger with which you have hitherto persecuted Me, although I have never done anything to injure you. I am quite ready to forgive all you have done against Me, if you will only cease despising Me. Even if your sins outnumber the hairs of your head, "return to Me, and I will receive thee."[4] Do not let shame or fear of the deformity of your sins keep you back; I know well what you have done. "Thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers."[5] "Nevertheless, return to Me, and I will receive thee;" I will forget all the insults you have offered Me, and will no longer remember your sins. "Therefore, at the least from this time, call to Me, 'Thou art my father,'"[6] and you shall be My dearest child, and I shall be to you as before, full of fatherly love and kindness, for I wish to have you with

[1] Ecce, sto ad ostium et pulso; si quis audierit vocem meam, et aperuerit mihi januam, intrabo ad illum.—Apoc. iii. 20.

[2] Illud simile est stanti ad ostium cujusdam divitis, et roganti.—Rupert l. 2, in Apoc.

[3] Vocavi, extendi manum meam.—Prov. i. 24.

[4] Revertere ad me, et ego suscipiam te.—Jerem. iii. 1.

[5] Fornicata es cum amatoribus multis.—Ibid.

[6] Ergo saltem amodo voca me, Pater meus.—Ibid. 4.

Me in heaven. "Wilt thou be angry forever, or wilt thou continue unto the end?"[1]

A goodness and mercy on the part of God!

O my Lord and my God! what dost Thou say? Would it not satisfy Thy goodness, would it not be even too great a favor to me, wicked sinner that I am, if Thou wert graciously to permit me to approach Thee in all humility, in order to implore Thy pardon? I have sinned, not Thou! I have offended Thee, not Thou me! And yet Thou art the first to come and ask me for my friendship! Yes, my dear brethren, so great is His love, so burning His desire to pardon sinners; and therefore, in the Parables, He represents Himself to us sometimes as a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep over mountain and valley, through thistles and thorns, running after it with bleeding feet, and when He has found it, enticing it in the most loving manner to come to Him, and then bringing it back to the fold of His elect sheep with great rejoicing; and again, as a father, running out to meet his returning prodigal son, who has squandered away all his spiritual graces and gifts by leading a sensual and wicked life, and when He sees him afar off, naked and hungry, falling on his neck, embracing him as if he were his dearest child, and celebrating his return by inviting all his friends and neighbors to a feast.

Which cannot be sufficiently admired.

Wonderful goodness and mercy of my God! Thou, O Lord, art wonderful in all Thy works! The seraphim and all the heavenly spirits stand before Thy throne and veil their faces, because they cannot bear the splendor of Thy divine Majesty, nor fathom the depth of Thy infinite perfections; but there is nothing surprises me so much as this goodness and mercy of Thine! When I have once understood that Thou art necessarily the true God, that Thou art not subject to change, and that Thy greatness is incapable of increase, it is not difficult for me to see that Thou must be present in all places; when I have learned by faith that Thy wisdom is infinite. I am not surprised that in one glance Thou seest all things, present, past, and future; when I have been taught to adore Thy infinite power, that nothing can withstand. I am not astonished to hear that, by a mere act of Thy will, the mere breath of Thy lips, Thou hast created out of nothing the heavens and the earth, with all they contain. I tremble with fear at Thy strict justice, according to which Thou hast not spared even the angels, and hurlest into a lake of fire among the demons, to burn there forever, away from Thy face,

[1] Numquid irasceris in perpetuum, aut perseverabis in finem?—Jerem. iii. 5.

the soul purchased by the Blood of Thy only Son, on account of its having consented to a single, momentary thought against Thy law; yet even that I can easily understand, when I consider the infinite greatness of Thy Majesty, worthy of all honor and love, which is insulted most grossly by every sin, and the obstinacy and inconceivable wickedness of the sinner who, in spite of Thee, wilfully and deliberately transgresses Thy well-known law for some worthless thing. But the more I know of Thy greatness, the more vividly faith represents to me Thy infinite perfections, the more, too, does my astonishment increase when I hear, read, and experience that Thou, O God, goest after a mere mortal; that Thou, a God of such greatness, so patiently, so forgivingly, so humbly goest in search of, and callest out after, and offerest pardon to, and most earnestly implorest to return to Thee, a poor miserable worm of the earth, of whom Thou art not at all in need, whose everlasting damnation would not in the least interfere with Thy infinite happiness, and by whom Thou hast first been offended; and this Thou askest of him as if it were a great and necessary favor to Thyself! The more I admire and praise this goodness and mercy of Thine, the more I, a poor miserable sinner, am in need of them, the less can I understand or fathom them. In this matter I must surrender my understanding, and confess with Thy servant, St. Lawrence Justinian, that, "he who tries to investigate the ineffable wealth of the divine mercy, must be overwhelmed by the very effort."[1]

Hence it is an inconceivable discourtesy on the part of the sinner to defer accepting the divine invitation.

And yet there is another thing, which possibly is still more to be wondered at; to me, indeed, it would seem incredible, nay, impossible, if experience did not prove it to be true, and that is, that the man whom Thou, O great God, seekest, invitest, and implorest to return to Thee, will not come at once, disdains to hear Thy loving invitation, turns his back on Thee, and shuts the door in Thy face. Come some other time, he says to Thee, as if he were speaking to a beggar; I have nothing for Thee now; I know well, O God, what Thou wishest me to do; Thy desire is that I should abstain from sin; but it does not suit me to gratify Thy desire now; some other time, perhaps, I may do so, after having committed still more sin. Thy desire is that I should do penance and repent of my sins; but I will not do it now; later on I will see what I can do in that way. Thou implorest and entreatest me to grant Thy request; but I prefer not to listen to

[1] Quisquis dominicæ miserationis ineffabilis voluerit investigare divitias, omnino in ipsa inquisitione succumbet.

Thee now; at some future time I may do so. Thou offerest me pardon, grace and favor, fatherly love, and Thy eternal kingdom of heaven; but I do not desire Thy favors now; come some other time. O insolence! what words can I find to express thy malice! O patience of my God, who bears to be thus ill-treated by a lump of earth, and bears it in silence, Thy goodness surpasses my understanding! O sinner, how can you turn away your God so discourteously? Do you not (and if you have a spark of decency left, you ought to consider this attentively) act with the greatest discourtesy towards your sovereign Lord? Do you not treat Him as you would some worthless man, who has neither power nor authority, and who is dependent on your favor for the very means of livelihood? And yet it is for your own interest, and not for His, that you should at once be freed from the miserable state of sin, from the imminent danger of eternal damnation. Have you any reason for continuing to offend your Lord and your God? Is it right and just for you to do so? Will you still sing the same old tune: I will do penance, but not now some other time; I will be converted, but not at once; I will abandon sin and amend my life, but not immediately? Do you, I ask again, do you intend to give no other answer to your God when He calls you?

And to continue to offend Him from whom he expects forgiveness afterwards.

Then, if so, listen to what I am now going to say, and learn from it how grossly unjust your conduct is: I use the argument of St. Bernard. If you are determined to go on sinning, you either believe that God will forgive you later on, or you do not believe it. In the latter case, what madness it is for you, if you have any hope for escaping hell and going to heaven, not to be converted at once, since God now so generously offers to forgive you! What folly, to defer penance to a time when, as you maintain, you will have no grace to expect! But if you believe, as you pretend, and I know not on what grounds, that, in spite of your having offended Him for such a long time, God will yet pardon you, what an injustice it is, what unpardonable insolence, what diabolical malice on your part, to find an occasion for further sin in the very fact that should make you at once begin to love God above all things with your whole heart! Will you then continue to offend Him who has borne with you so long and so patiently, who is so mercifully willing to receive you again into His friendship, and to make you eternally happy with Himself in heaven?

Although he

And besides, is it not most unjust for you to steal away from

is not sure of the future.

God the present time, which is the only time you are certain of, and which you are bound by countless titles to devote to His service, and to put Him off with the promise of a future, of which you are not certain of having a single moment at your disposal? You say that you will serve God hereafter; but who has told you that you will be alive then? And if you are not sure of the years, months, weeks, and days that are to come, why do you reserve them for the service of God, to whom you are bound to devote every moment of your life? Are you not simply trying to deceive the Almighty? does not your conduct show that you have not an earnest desire of heaven? In fact, you are paying with ready money the devil, who should not have the least claim on you, while you put off to an indefinite period the payment of the debt you owe to God, to whom everything you have belongs.

And even if the future were certain, he will not leave off sinning till he is tired of it.

But even supposing you were certain of the future, you still act most unjustly to God by intending to give Him only the remnant of a vicious life. You will do penance, be converted, amend your life, and serve God; but not until you have satisfied to the full your evil inclinations and sensual appetites. Then you give to God the time that you have left after having served the devil. Your soul was consecrated in holy Baptism as the temple and dwelling place of God, and you will allow Him to enter it only after the devil has occupied it for many years, and defiled it with all sorts of abominations? Your whole life should be spent in praising and blessing God, and you give the best part of it to the devil, while God must be satisfied with the miserable remnant, when you have neither desire, nor power, nor opportunity to sin any more? In that way you do not so much abandon sin as sin abandons you, as St. Augustine says: "your sins have left you; not you, your sins."[1] Suppose that two people are sitting gambling at night by the light of a candle; suddenly the candle goes out and they are obliged to give up their game, do they give it up because they do not care to play any longer? Not at all, but because they have no light; if they had another candle they would play away. O sinner, amend your life; cease offending God, you have insulted Him long enough! What is your answer? Oh, I will amend by and by, when my appetites are sated, when my youth is passed, when old age comes on, when that person is dead or gone away from me, when the occasion is removed, when sickness comes on and

[1] Peccata te dimiserunt, non tu illa.—S. Aug. Hom. 41.

death is at hand; then I will give up sinning and will be converted and serve God. That is to say, that you will allow the torch of your life to be burnt out, and not amend your ways until you are on your death bed, when you will have neither power nor desire to sin any more; and you will not begin to serve God until you are wearied and worn out in the service of the devil.

What fearful injustice on the part of the sinner!

If Cain was cursed because he selected the worst of his fruits to offer as a sacrifice to God, what sort of a curse will you then deserve, O man, since you offer to God the worst part of your life? What would you think of a man who would offer a prince nothing to eat but soiled bread crumbs, the refuse of meat and vegetables, and things of the kind that are given only to the dogs? Ah, my Lord and my God, there are many men who treat Thee, if I dare say so, like a dog! They eat the kernel themselves and give Thee the shell; the young and tender flesh they keep to satisfy their own greed, while the old worthless bones are thrown to Thee! The sweet wine of youth is poured out as a libation to the devil, while Thou must be satisfied with the sour dregs! Ah, far different, O Lord, is Thy treatment of us! There was not a moment of Thy long eternity in which Thou didst not think of us and love us! Thy whole life, O Jesus, was spent for our salvation; all Thy thoughts, words, and actions Thy passion and death, were for our welfare, and Thou hast already prepared an eternal banquet of joys in heaven, as a reward for the small service we can render Thee here! And how do we act towards Thee? If we had an eternity to live on earth, we should in strict justice spend every moment of it in loving Thee, nor could we even then make a sufficient return for the love Thou hast shown us; and yet, though our lives are so short, and so uncertain that we are not sure of even a quarter of an hour, we are unwilling to spend any part of them in Thy service, except some future years, or it may be days or hours!

He has therefore reason to fear that God will reject him hereafter.

O sinners, do you not yet see how unjustly you act when you refuse to hearken to the voice of God, Who now calls and invites you, and put off your repentance and conversion? Oh, how I fear lest His goodness and mercy may soon be turned into stern vengeance! He has fixed a certain limit to all our works, as well as to His own inspirations and graces; perhaps He is calling to-day for the last time; perhaps He has determined, if you still continue to despise Him after this exhortation, to deal with you as you deal with Him. Hear the threat He utters by the Psal-

mist David: "They shall return at evening, and shall suffer hunger like dogs;"[1] you have treated Me like a dog, you have given Me the very worst part of your lives, and have turned Me away from your doors like a poor beggar; but the time will come when I too shall treat you like dogs; when the evening approaches I shall see you chained up like dogs; I shall hear your moans and howls and shrieks when the dread of death shall be upon you; and what will you have to expect from Me then? My special grace and assistance to free you from the state of sin? No, they are not for such as you! I will give you the same answer that you so often gave Me; go away, I will say, I do not wish to give you My grace now, I will behold you suffering the pangs of hunger in hell like dogs, and I will rejoice thereat. "Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded;"[2] "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."[3] I have so frequently offered you My grace, but you refused it then; I offered you pardon of your sins, but you did not accept it; my eternal kingdom, but you had no desire for it; and now I, whom you have so despised and ill-treated; I, who have before now wept over your miseries; I, who have shed My Blood for you; I, who have given My life for you; I, who have so often fruitlessly entreated and exhorted you, "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock," when the demons, to whom you are now giving your lives, will carry you, body and soul, into hell; I will laugh, when you are howling in exterior darkness; I will laugh, when you are burning in the lake of fire; I will laugh, when you are tortured with an unsupportable stench; I will laugh, when you are calling upon death, that will not come to you for all eternity; I will laugh and will mock. O merciful Saviour, who didst come to call not the just, but sinners, what a bitter laugh is that for Thee! And wilt Thou then rejoice at our eternal destruction? Certainly, I will laugh at it, "because I called, and you refused."

Conclusion and resolution to repent at once.

But, O my good God, I will come to Thee! Behold me prostrate at Thy feet, not so much through fear of Thy just anger and displeasure, as through love of the goodness and mercy with which Thou hast waited for me so long, and called me so often! It would be a most shameful thing for me to turn Thee again away from my door, and to despise Thy proffered grace! Thou,

[1] Convertentur ad vesperam, et famem patientur ut canes.—Ps. lviii. 15.
[2] Quia vocavi et renuistis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.—Prov. i. 24.
[3] Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo et subsannabo. —Ibid. 26.

O great God, holdest out Thy hand to me, a poor mortal; shall I still refuse to take it? Thou, Whom I have so often offended, desirest reconciliation, shall I then still continue to hate and persecute Thee? I have given so few hours of my life to Thy service, but Thou art ready to forget all my ill treatment of Thee; shall I not then begin at once to love Thee? Or shall I still defer repentance and amendment? Oh, no, my most merciful God, I will follow the advice of Thy handmaid Judith, "For as much as the Lord is patient, let us be penitent for this same thing, and with many tears let us beg His pardon;" [1] yes, O Lord, even because Thou art good, and callest me, will I do penance, and I will do it at once. Now I will begin what I should have done long ago, to serve Thee with all my strength! I am sincerely sorry that I have acted so unjustly to Thee hitherto, that I have so grossly offended Thee, my merciful God, that I have so often closed my ears to Thy invitations. Never again, O Lord, will I treat Thee so vilely! From this moment forward I bid adieu to all those people, to all those worldly goods and pleasures, that have hitherto kept me from serving Thee! And Thou, O Jesus, who receivest sinners, receive me too in Thy mercy, now that I am filled with sorrow and repentance. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the time of a Jubilee.

Text.

Pro Christo legatione fungimur, tanquam Deo exhortante per nos. Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

"For Christ therefore we are ambassadors, God, as it were, exhorting by us. For Christ we beseech you, be reconciled to God."

When the great God speaks, then certainly must man be ready to listen. When the sovereign Lord desires and asks for anything by His inspirations, then, indeed, should man at once obey and grant His request, especially when what He asks is for our own good. My dear brethren, "for Christ we are ambassadors, God as it were exhorting you" by our voice, and we beg and implore of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, "be reconciled to God." Sinners should make peace with the God whom they have offended; that most desirable peace, in which our own conscience gives us testimony that we are children of God, now

[1] Quia patiens Dominus est, in hoc ipso pœniteamus, et indulgentiam ejus fusis lacrymis postulemus.—Judith viii. 14.

especially, since, by making peace with heaven, we wish to obtain that peace among Christian potentates which is so ardently and so generally desired, and to be freed from the greatest of all temporal calamities, the scourge of war. The conditions of this peace that we are to make with God are very favorable and advantageous to us; and therefore any Christian who does not profit by them, and sincerely repent of his sins, must indeed be an obdurate and a hopeless sinner. "For Christ we are ambassadors," God exhorting you by our words, and in His name we beg of you, "be reconciled to God;" make peace with Him at once! Mark those words; it is God who exhorts you by us; it is God who offers to make peace with you; He is the first to implore you, as it were suppliantly, to be reconciled to Him. To refuse Him, to say to Him, as some do, I will repent, but not now, later on, would be a gross and intolerable injury, as I shall now show. My Plan of Discourse then is: To desire to make peace with God, not now, but at some future time, is most unjust towards the good God, who is the first to offer to make peace with us. Such is the whole subject of the present exhortation. O God of mercy, grant that there be no sinner so hard-hearted so discourteous, as not to hearken to Thee at once, and to do penance! This we beg of Thee, etc.

FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE LITTLE HOPE OF SALVATION THERE IS FOR THE SINNER WHO DEFERS REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, is, if not a thoroughly false hope, at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one; therefore the sinner should do penance at once.—*Preached on the third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente.—Luke xv. 10.

"There shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."

Introduction.

Last Sunday I showed how unjustly sinners act towards God by refusing to hear His calls and by deferring their conversion. And now I ask, how is it with themselves? Do they despair of salvation? Have they given up all hopes of heaven? If you put the question to them, they will all answer: No, God forbid; we hope to save our souls, and to be happy in heaven. And on what do they ground their hopes? On repentance and the amendment of their lives? O sinners, if that is the case, then your hopes rest on the one sure foundation! Hear what He who seeks and receives sinners assures you of, and be consoled: "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance!" Yes, they answer, it is on that assurance I depend. Come, then, at once! Do penance; amend your lives; run to your Shepherd, who is stretching out His arms to you! Certainly, they say; but not yet; later on. Oh! then I see that the foundation of your hopes is future penance? But I tell you now, by way of paternal warning, and I shall prove to you that

Plan of Discourse.

The sinner's hope of salvation, when founded on future repentance, if not a thoroughly false hope, is at least a treacherous one, generally speaking, and always a presumptuous one. Such is the whole subject of to-day's exhortation.

Therefore, do penance and amend your sinful lives at once, if you wish to give joy to the angels and to ensure your salvation. Such shall be the conclusion. Give us Thy powerful grace thereto, O merciful Saviour, who receivest sinners: we beg it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

The sinner who trusts his salvation to future penance, builds on a very treacherous foundation;

I have still time enough; I am young and strong; I will repent by-and-by, confess my sins, and serve God faithfully. Such is the cry of most sinners. You may hear it from blasphemers and slanderers; from the impure, the unjust, the vindictive; from drunkards, and from all who are not earnestly resolved to give up their accustomed vices. Thus does the hellish hound seek to change the birds he has caught into crows and ravens, that always croak out. "*cras! cras!*" to-morrow! to-morrow! But you, who croak in that way, hear the threat that God utters by the Prophet Sophonias. Speaking of such sinners, the Prophet imagines himself to be walking through the streets,

listening to all sorts of birds singing in the different houses, when over the door of one house he sees a raven; O unlucky house! he cries out; it is all up with you! you will soon fall to ruin! "The voice of the singing-bird in the window, the raven on the upper post;" and what follows? "I will consume her strength."[1] I will take away all her strength, so that she shall go to ruin. Sinner! says St. Augustine, you are living at ease in vice; there is a singing-bird in the open window; you are often warned and exhorted to do penance and be converted to God, and you cry out: Not now! some other time! "*cras! cras!*" There is the raven's croak over the door of your heart. "I tell you, that, as long as you utter that croak, you are hastening to destruction."[2]

Namely, on the future, of which he cannot promise himself a moment.

For, tell me now, on what do you ground your hopes of salvation? On the penance, you say, that I will do. And when will you do it? Oh, by-and-by, you answer. But you have said the same thing before, and have often repeated it, and yet the time for doing penance seems as far as ever! It will come, you say, sooner or later. O blind mortal that you are! You speak as if you carried the future about in your pocket! Tell me, in God's name, how long have you to live, how much time have you still left to do penance? Can you say that you are sure of a year, a month, a day, nay, even of an hour? You know nothing whatever about it, for you dare not contradict the God of truth, who says to you and to me, "watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour."[3] "Be you then also ready; for at what hour you think not, the Son of man will come."[4] Whether you are old or young, weak or strong, sick or in good health, you know not whether you have a day or an hour of life still left.

For God can deprive him of life at any moment.

The end of life, says the philosopher Seneca, should always be before the eyes of young and old; "for our lives will not be demanded of us, as if they were an interest due at a fixed date."[5] And how then? Let us hear what St. Paul says. "Keep the good thing committed to thy trust;"[6] be careful of the deposit that God has entrusted to your keeping. There is a great difference between a deposit, and interest that has to be paid. The

[1] Vox cantantis in fenestra, corvus in superliminari; quoniam attenuabo robur ejus.—Sophon. ii. 14.

[2] Ecce tibi dico cum facis vocem corvinam, occurrit tibi ruina.—S. Aug., serm. 164. de tempore.

[3] Vigilate itaque quia nescitis diem neque horam.—Matt. xxv. 13.

[4] Et vos estote parati, quia qua hora non putatis, Filius hominis veniet.—Luke xii. 40.

[5] Non enim citamur ex censu.

[6] Bonum depositum custodi.—II. Tim. i. 14.

interest is due at a certain time, before which it cannot be demanded; whereas a deposit has no fixed time, the lawful owner can claim it whenever he pleases. This life is not an interest, but a deposit, so that there is not an hour in which one can be certain that it will not be demanded of him. If it were an interest, then, O sinner, you might say, I am still young and strong; my time is not come to pay the interest and to die; and you might have some excuse for your daring hope that you will do penance hereafter, be reconciled to God, and amend your sinful life. But since it is a deposit entrusted to your care, which the Lord and Master of life can demand of you in a hundred different ways, at His pleasure, without giving you the least warning, how can you dare to think and to say, I will repent and amend by-and-by, at some future time? If the Lord of your life were this night to give power to the demons to strangle you, you would not be the first to whom that has happened. If you were now suddenly struck dead with a fit of apoplexy, you would not be the first to die in that way. If you were this evening to be pierced by a sword as you walk through the streets, or to be killed by a chance shot, you would only be the victim of an accident that has already caused the death of many who were of the same opinion as you are now, and who deferred repentance. Do you not see, then, how weak, treacherous, and uncertain is the foundation on which you build your hopes of eternal happiness, namely, the uncertain future time, which is not yours, which you cannot dispose of in the least, and which may never be for you?

Therefore he acts foolishly and presumptuously; shown by a fable.

And meanwhile you are now actually in that miserable, unhappy state, in which, if the Lord were to take the deposit away from you, you are sure of being unhappy with the demons for all eternity. Where are your prudence and common-sense? How can you be at ease in that state? Remarkable is the fable related by St. Cyril: A sailor on the high seas was once very desirous of coming to land; he saw far off what he thought to be an island; he made for it at once, disembarked, and lit a fire to warm himself and to cook some food; but in a few minutes the island began to move, and he, thinking that it was on account of an earth-quake, betook himself immediately to his ship. But when he looked round, he saw the supposed island swimming about, and then knew that it was an enormous whale. Enraged at being thus deceived, he cried out to it: "Why have you thus betrayed me by pretending to be an island?" "And why," asked

the whale in return, "did you trust to me, who am not fixed to any one spot?" See how foolish and presumptuous you are, O sinner, to trust to a treacherous future your repentance and your eternal happiness. The sailor was excusable, because he thought the whale was really an island; but you are building on what you know very well to be unstable ground that is always flitting away. The sailor had his ship to fly to for refuge; but your faith teaches you for certain that, if your foundation once begins to move, that is, when the time of life is past for you, you have no other means left to escape eternal ruin. The sailor saw before his eyes that which he thought to be an island, and he knew that he could land on it; while you are utterly blind as to the future, and know not whether you will ever see it or not; and yet you trust to it your eternal life. Can there be any greater folly and presumption?

By deferring penance, he makes it more difficult.

But suppose that that indefinite future time really arrives, do you know that you will then do penance, amend your life, and be converted? You know what you have now determined to do; but who has told you that you will do it when the time comes? I now say to you, repent of and detest your sins, and abstain from them in future. No, you answer, not yet. And why not yet? Oh, it is too hard for me now; too difficult altogether to give up my love for that creature, to abstain from that pleasure, that bad habit. And if that is too difficult now, what will it be afterwards, when you will have spent a long time in the indulgence of that foolish love, that sensual passion, that bad habit? Is it likely to be easier for you to abstain from it then, than now? If you will but use your common-sense in the matter, you will see that your difficulty will increase more and more.

Shown by a simile.

"A long sickness is troublesome to the physician," says the Holy Ghost by the wise Ecclesiasticus; "the physician cutteth off a short sickness."[1] That is to say, a long-continued sickness wearies out the physician; while he has no trouble in curing a slight one. The meaning of this is evident. The physician is called in all haste to the sick man; as usual he feels his pulse at once, and notices a great increase of inward heat. Where do you feel the pain? he asks the sick man. Oh, answers the latter, over my whole body. This is a serious matter, thinks the other; it must be a case of violent fever. When, he asks further, did you feel ill first? Yesterday, is the answer; I knew there was

[1] Languor prolixior gravat medicum; brevem languorem præcidit medicus.—Ecclus. x. 11, 12.

something wrong, because I had no appetite for my meals. Oh, then, if it is only since yesterday that you are ill, we will soon have you all right again. It is well for you that you sent for me in time. He is called to another sick person, whom he finds to be quite worn out, weak, and languid. Oh, he thinks, this is a bad sign! How long has he been ill? he asks those who are in attendance. He has now been ill for a long time, is the answer; we have tried all sorts of remedies; but nothing has done him any good. Ah, my good friends, says the physician then, there is no help for him now; he had better make his will, for he will never recover. But can you not prescribe something for him? Certainly I can, but to what purpose? The disease is an inveterate one; it has eaten into the marrow of his bones; it might have been cured if the remedy had been taken in time; but there is no chance now; it would take a miracle to save him. See how difficult it is to heal an illness of long standing, which, if it had been attended to in the beginning, might have been easily cured.

The ordinary means are generally of little avail with an inveterate sinner.

The Holy Ghost applies all this to the moral maladies of the soul. A man commits a mortal sin through natural weakness and frailty, or by being careless in a dangerous occasion, or because he is overcome by some violent temptation; he commits it two or three times, and even oftener. Alas! he is already in a dangerous and fatal illness. But what does it take to cure him of it? A single thought prompted by his uneasy conscience. My God, he says to himself, what have I done! A single good inspiration of God or of his holy guardian angel, to remind him that he has lost heaven, and deserved hell; the hearing a sermon in which his conscience is touched, so that he begins to think of the wretched state in which he is; any of these remedies is quite enough to cure him, to move him to earnest repentance and detestation of his sin, with a firm resolution never to commit it again; because his sin has not yet become inveterate, nor grown to a habit. There you have a case in which the cure is effected at once by the first remedy that God applies, and that the sick person takes without delay. But the sinner who continues in vice year after year; the unchaste man who has been for a long time wallowing in the filth of his unholy passions; the unjust man who has been steadily enriching himself by usurious and unlawful practices; the drunkard of long standing, accustomed to cursing and swearing; these and such as these, who have often confessed their sins, but not amended

their lives, they have now to return to God by sincere repentance; they must give up forever their sensual pleasure and accustomed vices, and live chastely, justly, soberly, and holily. Oh, how troublesome and difficult they will find it! God may give them an inspiration, their good angel may speak to their hearts, all the preachers in the world may exhort them, but it is all to no purpose; their sin is inveterate; it is a disease that has for a long time been eating into their vitals; remedies have been prescribed and forced on them often enough already; but no cure has been effected, for they have lost their power on inveterate sinners, and if God does not, so to speak, work an evident miracle of grace in their behalf, there is no hope for them.

As we see in the traitor Judas.

When has the world ever seen a more experienced physician of souls than Our Lord Jesus Christ? How many great sinners there were who followed Him, how many whom He sought out Himself; and He cured them all! The first word of warning He spoke, cured James and John of their ambitious desire to have the two first places in His kingdom. The first call He gave Matthew, who was then a public sinner, cured him of injustice so effectually, that he left all he had and followed Christ. The incredulous Thomas was cured by the first touch. A single look of His was enough to make Peter weep bitterly for having denied Him; and the first inspiration and ray of light that Magdalene, a public sinner, received, cured her of the vice of impurity. But none of the remedies that He applied to Judas was successful; so that the latter died impenitent and despairing. Whence arose the difference? The malady of the former was either recently contracted, or else they at once took the prescribed remedies, and did penance; Judas, on the contrary, had indulged his avaricious desires too long, and his disease had become inveterate. For, long before he betrayed his Master into the hands of his enemies for thirty pieces of silver, he was, as the Evangelist says, "a thief,"[1] and therefore he murmured at the waste of the precious ointment which Magdalene poured over Our Lord's head and feet. And what excellent opportunities he had of correcting that vice! He was in daily intercourse with Christ, the Son of God, he heard His salutary instructions and exhortations, and saw in Him a model of perfect poverty; but nothing could induce him to amend his life. How lovingly and tenderly Christ spoke to him at the Last Supper, through a desire of making him enter into himself and repent! Our Lord

[1] Fur erat.—John xii. 6.

even washed and kissed his feet, fed him with His own flesh and blood, and said to him publicly, as a salutary warning, "one of you is about to betray Me."[1] The other apostles were very much troubled at this, and began to ask Him, "Is it I Lord?"[2] Am I the treacherous apostle who is to commit such a crime? Judas alone kept silent, nor was he in the least disturbed, until Our Lord at last plainly alluded to him. "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish," He said, "he shall betray Me. . . . but woe to that man by whom the Son of man shall be betrayed."[3] Better would it have been for that man, if he had never been born! At last Judas asked Him: "Is it I Rabbi?" He saith to him: "Thou hast said it;"[4] you are the man. And yet the wicked man thought it too soon to do penance. While he was actually accomplishing his treason in the garden of Gethsemani, Our Lord kissed him, called him friend and again warned him. "Friend, whereto art thou come?"[5] He said. Who would not think that the most hardened heart would have been softened at these words? But no; they had no effect on the traitor. At last, when he saw that Jesus was really condemned to death, Judas wished to repent. "Then Judas. . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver, saying: 'I have sinned, in betraying innocent blood.'"[6] But his repentance was too late to be sincere; "he went and hanged himself with an halter."[7] "Useless, indeed," says St. John Chrysostom, "is the penance that is too long deferred!"

And in the end he will not do penance, at all.

Now, O sinner, what has become of the hopes of salvation that you built on the future? Your soul is now dangerously ill. "Wilt thou be made whole?"[8] I ask you, as Our Lord asked the infirm man in the Gospel. You have a salutary remedy at hand in the sacrament of Penance, and you have been often exhorted to have recourse to it, but your answer has always been: "No, I do not want that remedy yet; it is too severe; I find it too hard to free myself from my illness; there is still time; by-and-by I will take the remedy, and be cured." But wait till that by-and-by comes, and you will find that it will then be too late; for it will be far more difficult for you to do penance then, than now.

[1] Unus vestrum me traditurus est.—Matt. xxvi. 21. [2] Numquid ego sum, Domine? —Ibid. 22.
[3] Qui intingit mecum manum in apropside, hic me tradet .... vae autem homini illi per quem Filius hominis tradetur.—Ibid. 23, 24.
[4] Numquid ego sum, Rabbi? Ait illi: tu dixisti.—Ibid. 25.
[5] Amice, ad quid venisti?—Ibid. 50.
[6] Poenitentia ductus retulit triginta argentes..... dicens: peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matt. xxvii. 3, 4.
[7] Abiens, laqueo se suspendit.—Ibid. 5. [8] Vis sanus fieri?— John v. 6.

And even if, like Judas, you had an inefficacious desire to do penance, the justice of God, who will be wearied with waiting for you so long, will withhold from you the grace and the opportunity of repenting, of which you have made yourself unworthy. "Woe to them that are with child, and that give suck in those days," says Our Lord Jesus Christ.[1] Woe to those who are always full of inefficacious desires to do good works, and who never try to carry those desires into effect! Their good intentions will all come to naught at last. And such will be the case with all those who defer repentance from year to year. The Prophet Job says of such people: "His heart shall be as hard as a stone.[2] He may in the end try to make his confession; but it will be a cold and dead confession, without true supernatural sorrow, without a firm resolution of amendment, and his heart will remain as hard as a stone that nothing can soften.

Shown by figures from Holy Scripture.

In the Book of Exodus God publishes the following law: If a Hebrew was sold as a slave, he should have his liberty at the end of six years; but if he was contented with his position, and did not wish to be set at liberty, he had to remain a slave all his life. "And if the servant shall say: 'I love my master and my wife and children, I will not go out free;' his master shall bring him to the gods, (that is, to the judges and chiefs of the people,) and he shall be set to the door and the posts, and he shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall be his servant forever."[3] A strange, and, as it might seem, a useless law; for who would be so foolish as to choose slavery in preference to freedom? Do you know, O sinner, who is guilty of that folly? You are, and so are all those who, being in the state of sin, could be converted to God by doing penance, and defer doing it. By mortal sin you have sold yourself as a bond slave to the devil; how long are you now bearing that galling yoke? The good God offers you now, as He has often done before, the grace to free yourself from this slavery, and to regain the glorious freedom of His children. He says to you, in the words of St. Paul: "Behold, now is the acceptable time, behold, now is the day of salvation;"[4] return to Me; do penance, and amend your life! But you go on refusing the proffered grace; you put off the Almighty to some

[1] Vae autem prægnantibus et nutrientibus in illis diebus.—Matt. xxiv. 19.

[2] Cor ejus indurabitur tanquam lapis.—Job xli. 15.

[3] Quodsi dixerit servus: diligo dominum meum, et uxorem ac liberos; non egrediar liber; offeret eum dominus diis, et applicabitur ad ostium et postes, perforabitque aurem ejus subula; et erit ei servus in sæculum.—Exod. xxi. 5, 6.

[4] Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile, ecce nunc dies salutis.—II. Cor. vi. 2.

future time, which will perhaps never come for you. You are satisfied with your slavery; you think and say, "I love my master," I cannot give up that creature, and therefore I do not desire freedom. Oh, woe to you! what will become of you? By divine permission, your master, the devil, will pierce your ears as a sign of perpetual slavery; that is to say, he will make you deaf to all good inspirations and exhortations; God will withdraw His special graces from you, so that you shall not be able to do penance; for repentance will then become so difficult for you, that, humanly speaking, it will be an impossibility for you to be sincerely converted to God. And, indeed, this is only a just punishment for abusing the patience of the Almighty. You do not wish to be free? He will say: very well, then; remain in the slavery of the devil, and be his slave for all eternity! Such shall be the end of the presumptuous hope of eternal salvation that you have hitherto based on the future time, saying: 'I wish to go to heaven, and therefore I will do penance and amend my life by-and-by."

Useless to appeal to the example of other sinners who were converted at last.

But, you think, I hope it will not be so with me. There were many great sinners at all times in the world, and there are a great many still, who have done just as I am doing, and they were sincerely converted at last, were received again by a merciful God, and gained eternal happiness. David was guilty of adultery and murder, and had the guilt of those sins on his soul for some years, before he thought of repentance, and he is now in heaven. Manasses was converted after having spent forty-five years in idolatry, sacrilege, murder, and tyranny. Magdalene was converted after having led, almost from her youth, a luxurious, scandalous, and sinful life, and became a saint. Matthew became an apostle after having been a usurer. Zachaeus was received by Our Lord, after having been a public and notorious sinner, guilty of many acts of injustice; and there are countless examples of a similar kind. Why should I have less to hope than they had from the infinite mercy of God? At some future time I intend to imitate them and to save my soul. And do you again base your miserable hope on what happened to others? Have you forgotten what I said to you a few minutes ago? All the sinners you mention repented at once, as soon as they were enlightened by the grace of God, and had their eyes opened to their wickedness; they did not, like you, defer repentance to an indefinite period after having become sensible of the miserable state in which they were.

For he knows not if he will act like them.

But supposing even that some great sinners like yourself were truly converted, and saved their souls after having deferred penance, (although you cannot be certain in any particular case, since you cannot see the hearts of the penitents, whether their sorrow is sincere and supernatural, or not; it is true that many sinners like you go to confession; they all do so during Paschal time, if they are Catholics; you have done so too, and perhaps more than once a year; but, God help us! what miserable confessions those are which are not followed by any amendment!) still, I say, granted that such sinners were truly converted, have you on that account any grounds for believing that the same thing will happen to you? Is there any one who can tell you that for certain?

Most people like him do not. Shown by an example.

Another thing, too, you must not forget; for one like you, who is converted and saves his soul, there are a hundred who never repent sincerely and who are lost forever, because, as they have rejected the lights that were bestowed on them, and neglected to avail themselves of the opportunities of grace given them, so, by a just judgment of God, they are afterwards deprived of those lights and opportunities. Henry Grau writes of a usurer who was often tortured by remorse of conscience on account of his wicked and un-Christian mode of life, and was repeatedly exhorted by others to give it up, but he used always to say, like you: "Certainly, I will give it up, and do penance, for I am not so foolish as to lose my soul for the sake of temporal things; I will amend, but not now; by-and-by, some other time, I shall have a better opportunity; there is no danger yet, etc." He fell sick; a zealous priest warned him of his state, and exhorted him to do penance and make restitution. But where was his "by-and-by" then? After remaining speechless for a long time, he at last cried out, in a loud voice: "O penance, where art thou? I cannot repent now, because, when I might have done so, I refused."[1] And having said these words, he breathed his last.

Confirmed by another example.

There is a well-known incident related in the "History of Treves" of a certain commandant, who heard in a dream, on three successive nights, the words: "you will die during the siege."[2] As he saw no sign whatever of a siege, he tried to put the matter out of his head; but in spite of himself he felt uneasy, so he resolved to make a general confession of his whole life, and he

[1] O pœnitentia, ubi es? De cætero pœnitere non valeo, quia dum facere pœnitentiam potui, nolui.

[2] Morieris in obsidione.

actually wrote down his sins with the greatest exactness. When on his way to one of our houses, to make his confession to the then rector, Father Duræus, a certain woman of his acquaintance nodded to him from her window, and invited him in (alas! what snares the devil knows how to lay for souls). Not wishing to appear uncourteous, the officer accepted the invitation, and went into the house, thinking that he would have time enough afterwards to make his confession. He remained in the house for some hours, when suddenly an alarm was raised in the street that the enemy was attacking the town. He rushed out, and mounted his horse in order to prepare to defend the place, but as he was busily engaged on the ramparts, he was hit by a stray bullet and killed on the spot. Unhappy, eternally unhappy man! If you had kept out of that house a few hours before, and had made your confession as you intended, you would have saved your soul! But, alas, with that "by-and-by" of yours, short a time as it was in coming, you ruined yourself forever.

Conclusion and exhortation to do penance at once.

Sinner, what do you think of this? May not the penance that you intend to do "by-and-by," be frustrated in the same manner? what will it then avail you to indulge a foolish hope built on such a treacherous foundation, in a matter that concerns your eternal bliss, or eternal misery? It may be that many great sinners like yourself were afterwards converted and saved their souls; but what better will you be for that, if you are amongst the far greater number of those who were deluded by their presumptuous hopes, and are now burning in hell without hope of release? think well over this matter now, for it is one that deserves your most careful consideration. Say to yourself: "I am now in the state of sin, and if God were to demand my life from me, as He may do at any moment, I should certainly be lost forever; He now, in His goodness, offers me His grace and invites me to do sincere penance, to amend my life, and to make sure of my eternal salvation. What may happen "by-and-by" I know not, nor do I know whether there will be a "by-and-by" for me, or whether I shall then do penance, or not. I certainly do not wish to go to hell for all eternity; my great desire is to be happy with God in heaven; therefore I must not, I cannot, I will not wait any longer, but will at once make use of the means that Jesus Christ now offers me to regain entrance into the fold of His chosen sheep." And what is that? "My sheep hear My voice,"[1] says the good

[1] Oves meæ vocem meam audiunt.—John x. 27.

Shepherd. But when do they hear it? At all times, as often as He calls. And now I hear Him crying out: "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."[1] To day God is calling on me to be converted to Him and to abandon my wicked life; therefore this very day I will hearken to Him, I will repent of my sins, confess them candidly, and make a firm resolution never to commit them again. If I do this, I may have a sure and well-grounded hope that the angels in heaven will rejoice over me, and that I shall hereafter rejoice with them for all eternity. Sinners, say with me, with all your hearts, so shall it be. Amen.

On Deferring Repentance till the hour of death, see the following Fifth Part.

FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE DIFFICULTY THAT THE SINNER WILL HAVE IN CORRECTING HIS BAD HABITS, IF HE DEFERS REPENTANCE.

Subject.

The stone of sinful habits must be rolled away from the heart at once, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until it eventually becomes an impossibility.—*Preached on Easter Sunday.*

Text.

Quis revolvet nobis lapidem ab ostio monumenti?—Mark xvi. 3.

"Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"

Introduction.

The greater the desire of these holy women to behold and to anoint the dead body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the greater was their anxiety lest they should not be able to carry out their intention, for the grave was covered with a huge stone; and therefore they asked each other, "who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" We poor weak women have not the strength to do it. Nevertheless, they went on their way, determined to do their best. It is a difficulty of this kind, my dear brethren, that deters most sinners from doing sincere

[1] Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

penance, and being really reconciled to God. I say *sincere* penance, and being *really* reconciled to God; for in the ordinary confessions, especially at Easter, when every Catholic is bound to go, oh, what a lot of dissimulation there is! And how many there are who leave the confessional worse than they were when they entered it, because they have not a firm purpose of amendment! And that too, because they are shut up in a grave of sin by a huge stone that they are afraid to attempt to roll away. The inveterate habit of a certain vice, which they find it too difficult to give up all at once; an unlawful intimacy, which they imagine they cannot live without; the proximate occasion of sin, which they do not wish to abandon; this is the stone that lies on their hearts and that they think it impossible to remove. And therefore they often ask themselves, in their inefficacious desires, "who shall roll us back the stone?" who will free me at last from this occasion, this intimacy, this inveterate habit? To these I now say: Sinners! attack the stone at once, and courageously. God will help you with His grace to remove it now! But if you defer your repentance and amendment, it will be, humanly speaking, impossible for you to remove it, so that you will have little hope left of saving your souls, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

The stone of sinful intimacy and bad habit must be at once removed from the heart, for the longer one waits, the greater will be the difficulty of removing it, until at length it becomes an impossibility. Such is the whole subject of my exhortation.

Those who have during this Paschal time been truly reconciled to God, will be strengthened, by what I am about to say, in their good resolution never to go back to their former bad habits and sinful intimacies. Almighty and merciful God! through the powerful intercession of Thy most Blessed Mother Mary and of the holy angels, we beg of Thee to give Thy precious grace to the just, that they may persevere in Thy friendship, and to sinners, that they may this day roll away the stone from their hearts and free themselves completely from the grave of sin.

It is very hard to get rid of a bad habit.

I have undertaken to persuade you to do a very difficult thing, and when I consider the matter again, I am almost tempted to give it up as hopeless. For I am afraid it will be with me as it was with Lot, when he tried to persuade his two sons-in-law to leave the doomed city, Sodom. "Arise," he said

to them, "get you out of this place, because the Lord will destroy this city. And he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest."[1] So hard, as the Glossa remarks, did they find it to leave the city in which they had been born and brought up. Ah! far more readily would I undertake to move a huge mass of stone, than to roll away the stone of sinful habit from the hearts of some sinners by preaching. "So tyrannical a thing is habit," says St. John Chrysostom;[2] so hard and difficult it is to leave all at once that which for a long time has occupied our hearts and affections! And what else can it be but a matter of the greatest difficulty for the proud man, who has hitherto been given to every worldly vanity, all at once to become lowly in his own eyes, modest, and humble? For the avaricious man, who has amassed wealth unjustly, to deprive himself of it by making the necessary restitution, and to close his heart and its desires to riches and temporal goods? For the unchaste man, who has hitherto given loose rein to his inordinate desires, or who has fostered an impure attachment for some creature, to resolve never to give way again wilfully to a sinful thought even, and to abandon forever the object of his sinful love? For him who is addicted to cursing and swearing, to cut off that bad habit at once? For him who wastes his time in drinking and gambling, and in the sins that are occasioned thereby, to live a temperate and sober life, and to spend his time in serving God with diligence? For one whose heart has hitherto been filled with hatred, enmity, and secret ill will, to change all at once, to be sincerely reconciled to his enemy, and to love him as himself? In a word, must it not be difficult for one whose thoughts were sunk in the depths of hell, to raise them all at once to the heights of heaven, and to begin to lead a Christian, holy, and heavenly life? There is no doubt that that is a most difficult task; it is one which requires great labor and great skill.

Shown from Holy Scripture.

What reason had the Jews to weep and sigh for the flesh-pots of Egypt, as we read in the Book of Exodus: "And all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness," and said to them: "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat over the flesh-pots, and ate bread to the full![3]" What

[1] Surgite, egredimini de loco isto, quia delebit Dominus civitatem hanc. Et visus est eis quasi ludens loqui.—Gen. xix. 14.

[2] Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo.

[3] Et murmuravit omnis congregatio filiorum Israel contra Moysen et Aaron in solitudine; utinam mortui essemus per manum Domini in terra Ægypti, quando sedebamus super ollas carnium, et comedebamus panem in saturitate.—Exod. xvi. 2, 3.

reason, I ask, had they to give expression to such regrets, since their enjoyment of the flesh-pots of Egypt was earned only by hard labor under the merciless yoke of Pharao? And they sighed for the bread of slavery at the very time when God was leading them toward the promised land, and was feeding them miraculously with the heaven-sent manna! Were they not very foolish thus to long for the coarse food of slavery? St. John Chrysostom assigns a reason for this; "the Jews," he says, "longed for the garlic of Egypt, although they had the manna, on account of the influence of habit. Such a tyrannical thing is habit."[1] So difficult is it to give up what one has become accustomed to. Is it then useless for me, O sinners, to speak to you of the bread of heaven, when you have been once accustomed to the flesh-pots of the world? For even the Prophet Jeremias despaired in this matter. "If the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots, you also may do well, when you have learned evil."[2] Alas! who will roll us back the stone? Who will remove that heavy weight from our hearts?

Therefore it ought to be laid aside at once.

But what am I saying? I wish to persuade you to lay aside your sinful habits, and I represent to you in the very beginning, incautiously enough, that you will have an almost insurmountable difficulty in doing so! Instead of making your task easier by talking to you of the sweetness of repentance, I make it hard and bitter, and almost impossible! Is not that mode of proceeding likely to deprive you of all heart and courage for repentance, and to harden you still more in sin, by driving you to despair? No, O sinners! For the very fact of the difficulty of repentance, a fact that your own experience teaches you, must serve me as the only weapon that I intend using in order to conquer your understanding, and to convince you that you must at once, without delay, use every effort, and spare neither labor nor trouble, to roll away this stone, that is, to amend and abandon your sinful habits. For, tell me, do you intend to go to heaven or not? If the latter is the case, I have done with you, and there is no use in your hearing a sermon. But you say, God forbid! we certainly hope and desire to gain heaven, and to be eternally happy. Very good! But answer me this question: do you think you can save your souls, with that heavy stone on your heart, that shuts you up in the grave, in the state of sin?

[1] Judæi manna habentes, quærebant allia Egypti, propter consuetudinem. Adeo tyrannica res consuetudo est.—S. Chysost. Hom. 7. in Ep. i. ad Cor.

[2] Si mutare potest Æthiops pellem suam, aut pardus varietates suas; et vos poteritis benefacere, cum didiceritis malum.—Jerem. xiii. 23.

No, you say, we are not so ignorant as that; no one who is in the state of mortal sin can go to heaven; he must first be converted, do penance, and amend his life. Do you think, then, that you will one day repent and amend? Certainly; some day or other we will return what we have unjustly acquired, leave the proximate occasion of sin, make peace with our enemies, and give up vice. That is all I want for my purpose; now I have fast hold of you, provided only that you are willing to acknowledge the truth and to act accordingly.

Because it will be much more difficult to do so hereafter, as far as God is concerned.

Now, when do you intend to carry this resolution of yours into effect? Not yet, you say; it is too difficult now. And when, then? Some other time, in a year, or a few months perhaps. And do you believe that it will be easier for you to abandon your sinful habit and do penance in a few years or months, than it is now? This is the fearful trap by which the crafty tempter ensnares most sinners to eternal destruction; they fondly imagine that it will be easier for them to repent at some future time, because they know very well that repentance is necessary to salvation. But you may be quite certain that it will be far more difficult for you afterwards, than it is now. True, it will never be absolutely impossible for you to repent; yet, the longer you wait, the more months, weeks, days, nay hours, you spend in sin, the more troublesome will repentance become, until at last it will be, humanly speaking, impossible. And in the first place, this must appear clear enough when we consider the Almighty God. You acknowledge, O sinner, that you cannot free yourself from sin by your own natural strength alone, and that you never would do so unless God impelled you thereto by His grace. If you did not know this before, learn it now; it is an article of faith, and there can be no doubt about it. It is true that the good God never refuses to any one in this life, who is capable of receiving it, the grace by which he may be enabled to be converted and do penance; but the grace that is called efficacious, that is, the grace that God foresees man will really co-operate with, He is not bound to give to any one, and He bestows it as a special act of goodness and beneficence on whomsoever and at whatsoever time He pleases. Such is the general teaching of theologians. Again, the more wicked a sinner is, the longer he continues in sin, and the deeper evil habits have become rooted in his heart, so also the greater and more powerful, and, so to speak, even miraculous, must be the grace which will enable him to be truly converted. Our Divine Lord, as St. Augustine

remarks, teaches us that in the three people whom He raised from the dead, when raising the daughter of Jairus, He merely said: "Damsel, arise."[1] It cost Him, as it were, more trouble to raise the young man of Naim, who was being carried to the grave: "He came near and touched the bier;"[2] and He commanded him: "Young man, I say to thee, arise."[3] But what labor it cost Him to raise Lazarus, whose body had already begun to decay in the grave! "He groaned in the spirit and troubled Himself;"[4] as St. John says in the Gospel. And Jesus wept.[5] "Jesus, therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the sepulchre."[6] And when He had caused the stone to be taken away from the sepulchre, He immediately began to pray: "Jesus, lifting up His eyes, said: Father, I give Thee thanks that Thou hast heard Me."[7] Finally, "He cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come forth."[8] What was the reason of the difference in Our Lord's mode of proceeding in those three cases, my dear brethren? Had the almighty power of the Son of God greater trouble in raising one than the other from the dead? That cannot be; for to will and to accomplish are one and the same thing to Him. Christ, says St. Augustine, wished to show thereby that it is far more difficult, and requires a much more powerful grace, to convert one who has been buried for a long time in the grace of evil habits, than one who has sinned only now and then, or who has remained in sin only occasionally for a month or two, even during the space of several years.

Who will not give special graces hereafter.

Tell me now, O man, do you imagine that this special, powerful, and extraordinary grace, that God is bound to give to no one, will be given to you, when in some years' time you wish to amend your evil ways? How do you know that? You have never heard of a grace of that kind having been promised to any one, much less to yourself. But you say, perhaps it will be given to you? And perhaps, indeed, in all probability, it will not. For, to look at the matter reasonably, do you think that your continuing to offend Him is a likely way to induce the Almighty to bestow on you a special mark of His power? Is it probable that you willobtain extraordinary graces from Him, when, by offering Him insult upon insult, you make Him more and more your

[1] Puella surge.—Mark v. 41. [2] Accessit et tetigit loculum.—Luke vii. 14.
[3] Adolescens, tibi dico, surge.—Ibid.
[4] Infremuit spiritu et turbavit seipsum.—John xi. 33. [5] Et lacrymatus est Jesus.—Ibid. 35.
[6] Rursum fremens in semetipso venit ad monumentum.—Ibid. 38.
[7] Jesus autem elevatis sursum oculis dixit: Pater, gratias ago tibi, quoniam audisti me.—Ibid. 41.
[8] Voce magna clamavit: Lazare, veni foras.—Ibid. 43.

enemy? when you despise the grace He now offers you, and do not hesitate to say to His very face: No, O God, I do not want Thy grace now; some other time it will be more convenient for me to accept it; Thou canst help me in a few years, after I have caused Thee still more displeasure; then Thou canst give me grace, and still more powerful grace, too. Alas, poor mortal, who are you to dare so presumptuously to dictate to the Almighty God, and to prescribe a mode of action to His goodness? Do you think that God will wait upon you, as if He were your servant, and that He will do whatever you tell Him? Must he give you wonderful graces, that He denies to many a pious soul, and that, too, after you have continued still longer to insult Him?

But will abandon the sinner.

Be careful, I beg of you! It is not safe thus to insult and mock a great lord. God will allow you to go on for a time, and will bear with you most patiently, but instead of giving you a special grace, He (and how could it be otherwise?) will deliver you up to your evil inclinations, and will allow you to become more and more entangled in the meshes of your sinful habits. Hear the threat He utters by the prophet Isaias: "Woe to thee .... that despisest, shalt not thyself also be despised? .... when being wearied thou shalt cease to despise, thou shalt be despised."[1] "I called and you refused," He will say; "I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded."[2] I called you last year, or last month, and exhorted you to return to Me, but you would not; I stretched forth My hand to raise you up from the state of sin, but you did not deign even to look at Me; "I also will laugh in your destruction, and will mock."[3] Oh, what a terrible threat, says St. Augustine. Sin away then, if you are bent on doing so, but remember that "the time will come when the sinner will wish to repent and will not be able, because, when he might have repented, he refused to do so."[4] It is one thing for the sinner who falls through mere frailty, even a hundred times, and remains in the state of sin for a certain length of time, to find mercy from God; but a far different thing for him to find the same mercy, who makes a habit of sinning, and wilfully and obstinately perseveres in sin. The former occurs frequently; the latter very seldom. The same

[1] Væ qui spernis, nonne et ipse sperneris? Cum fatigatus desieris contemnere, contemneris.—Is. xxxiii. 1.

[2] Vocavi et renuistis; extendi manum meam, et non fuit qui aspiceret.—Prov. 1. 24.

[3] Ego quoque in interitu vestro ridebo, et subsannabo.—Ibid. 26.

[4] Venit tempus quando peccator velit pœnitere, et non poterit, quia, quando potuit, noluit.—S. Aug. serm. 58. de temp.

God who forgave the Ninivites, because, without waiting for the expiration of the forty days, they at once did penance for their sins in sackcloth and ashes, destroyed the whole world by a deluge, because in those days men did not hearken to oft repeated exhortations to repent, and refused to abandon their sinful habits. I do not wish, O sinner, to make out that repentance is impossible for you, or to drive you to despair, because you wish to defer your conversion, and to continue longer in sin; but this much I must tell you, that you will find repentance ten times more difficult hereafter, and that, if you are reasonable, you will say to yourself: If I find it hard to repent now, what will it be when the habit of sin has become inveterate? Therefore throw that heavy stone at once off your heart. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts!"[1] Do it at once, to-day; do not wait even till to-morrow, and much less for a few months, or years, or till old age, as you had determined.

It will also be more difficult as far as the devil is concerned.

The difficulty of conquering your bad habits will be made greater, too, by the devil, in whose service you are. Every sinner must know by experience, even if Holy Scripture said nothing about it, that he is a slave and servant of the devil. But perhaps you think that it is only a figurative slavery? If so, then just consider for a moment what you are and how you live; what strange, contradictory, and bewildering thoughts occupy your mind; what uneasiness and anxiety disturb your conscience, and what startling changes and contradictions there are in your will; and you will soon see that you are the slave of a remorseless tyrant, whom you must obey in all things, as the slaves among the Turks have to obey their taskmasters; nay, that you are, so to speak, compelled to dance to his piping. "They may recover themselves from the snares of the devil," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "by whom they are held captive at his will."[2] Are you not often aware of an inward impulse to do some good work? For instance, you know that it would be better for you to go to church, to hear a sermon, to remain away from that dangerous company, to say your prayers, to go to confession and Communion, etc.; but in spite of that knowledge of yours, the devil, either by himself, or by means of others, compels you, as it were, to go somewhere else, where you will commit a number of sins. How can he do that? Because you are not your own master, but his servant and slave, since you have given

[1] Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra!—Ps. xciv. 8.

[2] Resipiscant a diaboli laqueis, a quo captivi tenentur ad ipsius voluntatem.—II. Tim. ii. 26.

yourself over to him by your sinful habits. Thus he can do with you what he pleases; if he tells you to curse and swear, you are ready to do so; if he commands you to talk impurely, to slander your neighbor, to seek revenge, to sin against holy purity, you obey at once, although you know that you are doing wrong, and are acting against God and your conscience, to your own great detriment. So completely are you a slave to the devil.

Who has all the more power over the sinner.

What becomes now of your intention to repent, to amend your wicked ways and to be converted to God after some years, when you have spent your youth in sinful pleasures, and have fully satisfied all your inordinate appetites? If the devil has already so much power over your will, after you have lived for a few years or months in sin, what power will he not have after you have spent still more years and months in his service, adding daily sin to sin? If you cannot free yourself now from the ten or twelve cords with which he has bound you, how will you be able to escape when you are fettered in iron chains from head to foot? When the man whose son was possessed by the devil complained to Our Lord that the disciples failed to cast out the evil spirit, as we read in the Gospel of St. Mark, Our Lord asked at once: "How long a time is it since this hath happened unto him?"[1] And the father answered: "From his infancy." A strange question, my dear brethren, for Him to ask to whom nothing is unknown! For there is no doubt that Our Lord knew more about the matter than the young man's father did. Why did He ask the question then? In order, says the Glossa, that we may understand why the disciples could not drive out the devil. For it is as if Christ said: Since he has been possessed since childhood, it is no wonder that the evil spirit does not wish to leave him. O sinner, if it is now difficult for a confessor or a preacher to drive out of your heart the demon who has taken possession of it by the habit of sin, who will be able to expel that evil spirit after he has possessed you for several years longer? God alone could do it, and that too by a miracle of grace. But I am afraid there is little chance of His helping you, if you continue to despise Him as you now do. Do you not see that, by deferring repentance, you are making it more difficult, and are entangling yourself more and more in the snares of the devil?

And at last makes repentance

I pity the lot of the Israelites before they were freed from the slavery of Egypt, for they were forced to labor hard, "and they

[1] Quantum temporis est, ex quo ei hoc accidit? Ab infantia.—Mark ix. 20.

built for Pharao cities of tabernacles."[1] O unhappy people, do you not know what you are doing? Can you not guess for what the walls you are building are intended? They are to serve as your prison, to prevent your escaping from bondage. If you desire liberty, why do you labor to defeat your desire? Every brick you lay makes the walls of your prison higher and renders escape more difficult. Do you understand the figure, O sinners? Alas, much more do I pity your poor souls! "Pharao," says Paulinus, "compelled the children of Israel to build walls to prevent their own escape; and in the same way the devil urges sinners to add sin to sin, that they may surround themselves with a wall, which will imprison them perpetually."[2] How the devil must laugh at your labor and at your intention of doing penance after you have committed still more sin! You are like a bird ensnared in the nets of the fowler, that entangles itself still more by its futile efforts to get free, to the great amusement of its captor.

almost impossible for him.

But supposing even that the devil were to leave you in peace, and to place no obstacle in the way of your conversion, and that God were to bestow on you a powerful grace; even then there would be a greater difficulty on the part of your own will to co-operate with grace, and a more determined opposition to the call to repentance. For, do you know what is required for a sincere conversion? The grace of God is not enough, but you, O sinner, must work with it, and you must once for all hate above all evils everything you have hitherto loved against the command of God; while you must love more than all imaginable goods everything you have hitherto hated and avoided against the command of God; and you must have, moreover, a firm, earnest purpose never for all eternity to consent, even in mere desire, to a mortal sin, for the sake of any pleasure, or person, or thing, and to avoid carefully all dangerous occasions of sin. If you have not those dispositions, your repentance is worth nothing. What do you think of the matter now? Is it not likely that your conversion will be far more difficult, when the inordinate love of sinful pleasures has been heated and inflamed to the highest degree by the fuel that has constantly been supplied to it? when your disgust at and dislike of good works have taken deeper root in your heart?

Finally, it will be more difficult as far as the sinner himself is concerned.

[1] Ædificaveruntque urbes tabernaculorum Pharaoni.—Exod. i. 11.

[2] Compulit Pharao filios Israel facere muros, ne possint exire; ita diabolus in talibus acit addere peccata peccatis, ut inde murum facientes includantur, ne exeant.

For the desire and habit of sin will be always on the increase.

In Holy Scripture sin is compared to a weight or burden, to a bandage, to a cord, to an iliness, and to a skin. It is a *weight* that oppresses the overburdened soul, so that it cannot raise itself to heavenly and supernatural things. There is a child groaning under a burden it can scarcely lift; if you increase the load by twenty, thirty, or a hundred pounds, will it become easier to carry? Every sin is a *bandage*, that blindfolds the eyes of the understanding, so that it can hardly discern good from evil. If you tie a bandage over your eyes, you will have great difficulty in seeing; if you tie on several bandages, you will not be able to see at all. Sin is a *cord* that draws the will away from good and binds it fast to evil; double that cord, and you will deprive the will still more of its freedom and make it, as it were, a prisoner, as St. Augustine testifies to have been the case with himself, when it appeared to him almost an impossibility for him to amend his life. And why? "I was sighing in bondage, being kept therein not by another, but by my own iron will,"[1] which had become quite hardened by long-continued habits of sin. Sin is a *malady* of the soul. A fresh wound, says St. Bonaventure, can be easily cured; but when it gets old, no medicine can do it any good. The habit of sin is like a *skin*. "There are some," says Cardinal Hugo, "who put on the habit of sinning, not like a garment that may be taken off, but like their own skin, which can hardly be removed."[2] A young and tender skin is so sensitive that it cannot bear the prick of a needle, but the skin that has become hardened and callous by work can bear even burning coals. In the same way, says Eusebius Emissenus, "the unfortunate habit of sin has this effect, that it makes one less sensitive to sin the more he sins, while it gives him a greater desire for sin;"[3] because the inclination to evil is strengthened thereby, and the desire for forbidden pleasures increases the more it is indulged. From this comes, as St. Augustine says, a calm repose in wickedness, so that the sinner is quite satisfied with his condition, and has no desire to change it; nay, sin becomes to him a second nature, a necessity. "When a habit is not resisted, it becomes a necessity,"[4] which cannot be changed afterwards, no matter how much one may wish to change it.

[1] Suspirabam ligatus, non ferro alieno, sed ferrea mea voluntate.—S. Aug. l. 8, Conf. c. 5.

[2] Quidam induunt se consuetudine prava, non sicut vestimento, quod potest auferri, sed sicut pelle sua, quæ vix potest exui.—Hugo in Joan. 13.

[3] Habet hoc infelix consuetudo peccandi, ut quantum amplius peccaverit, tanto minus peccata ipsa intelligat, et tanto plus peccare delectet.

[4] Dum consuetudini non resistitur, facta est necessitas.

Now, O sinners, let us consider this matter reasonably. You acknowledge that it is difficult for you now to abstain from sin, although you are not yet so far away from the true light and from God; how do you think it will be with you hereafter, when God and His light are still farther from you? You have now perhaps to contend against twenty, fifty, or a hundred sins; by-and-by there may be thousands of them. You have now to overcome a habit of one or two months; in time that habit will have a standing of many years. If you confess now that it is very hard for you to overcome your nature, how will you be able to do it when your nature shall have become more and more corrupt by daily sins? If you cannot now resist an inordinate inclination, which as yet is only as it were a little barking cur, how will you be able to resist it when it has become a fierce, roaring lion? You cannot extinguish your desire now, although it is as yet but a spark; how will you be able to conquer it when it has become a great fire? You have a difficulty now in breaking a thread; how will you hereafter tear asunder a strong cable? The nail as yet has been struck by the hammer only two or three times, and you cannot pull it out without trouble; how will you be able to extract it when it has been driven in to the head by repeated blows? Your wound is still fresh, but it is hard to heal; how will you heal it when it has become putrid and cancerous? You cannot climb the mountain now, although you are half way to the top; how will you climb it after you have tumbled down to the very bottom. In a word, if it is so difficult for you now to overcome your bad habits and do penance, what will it be hereafter, when the skin shall have grown hard and callous, when the stone shall have been secured by so many bolts and bars.

Hence he will hardly be able to overcome the difficulty hereafter.

Alas, what a terrible threat Christ Himself launches forth against you! "You shall seek me, and shall not find Me;"[1] you shall die in your sins;[2] a threat that is to be understood particularly of the habit of sin. Truly, all the sins we commit are *our* sins; they are ours as to their malice, which comes from our perverse wills; ours as to the guilt and punishment they deserve, which guilt remains in us until we do penance; yet the sins we commit now and then through frailty, or when overcome by a violent temptation, are, properly speaking, not our sins as far as our inclinations and desires are concerned: for we repent of

He will remain in sin till death.

[1] Quæretis me, et non invenietis.—John vii. 34.
[2] In peccato vestro moriemini.—Ibid. viii. 21.

them easily, and soon throw them off our conscience. But the sins that are committed through long-continued habit, since they proceed from a more violent inclination and a more intense desire, and we persevere in them with studied intent and satisfaction, such sins have a special claim to be called *our* sins; just as a father calls his favorite child, "my child," although he has other children as well. In *your* sin then, O unhappy wretches, in your bad habits, which you refuse to amend, you will die, and go down to eternal death.

Conclusion and exhortation at once to amend one's sinful habits

Therefore I repeat, if you are in earnest about going to heaven, and consequently if you are in earnest about amending your lives, oh, then do not delay any longer! Do not wait till your salvation becomes almost impossible! Be like St. Augustine and make an earnest resolution to repent at once. He found it just as hard as you do to roll away the heavy stone from his heart, and he was always putting off his conversion from day to day; at last he said to himself: "How long shall I keep on saying to-morrow, to-morrow? Why not at once? Why should not this hour be the last of my disgrace?"[1] Do you also say, I will give up sin, and why should I wait till to-morrow, or next year, or till some uncertain future time? Why not at once? Is not sin at this moment the worst evil that could befall me? I will renounce the devil, and escape hell; but why should I wait for some years before doing so? Is not the devil cruel enough, or hell hot enough now? I will one day enter on the road that leads to heaven; but why should I put off doing so? Is not heaven good enough or beautiful enough for me now? I will begin one day to love Thee, O my God, and to serve Thee zealously; but why do I not begin at once? Art Thou not now worthy of infinite love? Have I not already offended Thee enough? Ah, my God, worthy of all love, the first offence I offered Thee was too much! Never should I have done anything to displease Thee! Shall I continue then to embitter Thee still more, to go away still farther from Thee, and to despise the grace Thou offerest me? Oh, no, Almighty and eternal God, I am now firmly resolved to amend at once! I will wait no longer; this very day the stone must be rolled away. At first I shall find it rather hard to change my mode of life, to give up the pleasures, the creatures I have been attached to; but I know that in time I shall enjoy peace of heart under Thy mild yoke, and that before long I shall be able to exult with St. Augustine, and say: "Oh,

[1] Quamdiu cras et cras? quare non modo? quare non hac hora finis turpitudinis meæ?

how sweet it has all at once become to me to be without the sweetness of vanities!"[1] Thou, O Almighty God, who on this day didst send Thy angel to roll away the heavy stone from the door of the sepulchre, that the pious women who were seeking Thee might enter unhindered, Thou, if Thou wilt, canst by Thy grace make everything possible and easy for me now! If I look at my manifold sins, I must acknowledge that I have made myself unworthy of this grace. Alas, I am sorry from the bottom of my heart that I have sinned so often! But Thy infinite mercy is not shortened; that very Blood that has washed away so many sins, has not yet ceased to flow for mine! Permit me then to prostrate myself before Thee, and implore Thee to give me a powerful grace, which will soften my heart, so that I may at once do penance for my sins; and strengthen my will against all temptations and dangerous occasions, so that, after I shall have rolled away the heavy stone from my heart, I may never again fall into the grave of sin, and may love Thee, my God, who art so worthy of love, with my whole heart and above all things, to the end of my life. O Lord, hear this my prayer! Amen.

SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE TORMENT CAUSED BY A BAD CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly, 1. by continually upbraiding her with her sins; 2. by continually threatening her with eternal damnation on account of her sins; therefore we should at once free ourselves from sin by penance, and never commit it again.—*Preached on the Feast of St. Thomas, Apostle.*

Text.

Post dies octo iterum erant discipuli ejus intus, et Thomas cum eis.—John xx. 26.

"After eight days again His disciples were within; and Thomas with them."

Introduction.

So obstinate and stiff-necked had Thomas become in his re-

[1] O quam suave mihi subito factum est, carere suavitatibus nugarum.

fusal to believe in the resurrection of Christ, that he separated himself from the disciples and would have nothing to do with them; for he could not hear with patience the arguments by which they proved to him that Christ had certainly risen from the dead, and that they had seen and conversed with Him. Yet he eventually came back to them again, doubtless on account of the uneasiness his bad conscience caused him; for he must have felt the sting of remorse when he remembered that he tried to make himself out wiser than the others, and that he persevered so long in his unbelief. To get rid of his uneasiness, at least in part, he again sought the company of the other disciples, after he had been away from them for eight days. And truly it was well for him that he did so, as otherwise he might never have regained peace of conscience, but have continued in his unbelief; for when Our Lord appeared to him on this occasion he acknowledged his error, and cried out, full of sorrow and repentance: "My Lord and my God!" How wonderful are the goodness and mercy of God to sinners! He invents all sorts of means to draw them to Himself and to keep them away from sin. He represents to them the uncertainty of life, the misery of an unhappy death, the loss of eternal happiness, and the inevitable, eternal torments of hell consequent thereon; and all these truths, as well as temporal trials and crosses, are so many special means that He makes use of to bring sinners to their senses. But, besides, He has given them over to a domestic torture, whose business it is to torment them day and night, namely, their own bad consciences. O sinners, if you are not sunk in the lowest depths of wickedness, you must know by your own experience what a cruel tormentor a bad conscience is! And are you not foolish, then, to remain in the unhappy state of sin, or to make a deliberate choice of that state by committing sin? For if you fear neither death, nor hell, nor any other punishment, at least the uneasiness and torment of your own consciences should frighten you. And it is a torment which has not its equal on earth, as I shall now show by way of salutary warning to you, and I say:

Plan of Discourse.

A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly, by continually upbraiding her with her sins; as I shall explain in the first part. A bad conscience tortures the soul most keenly by continually threatening her with eternal damnation on account of her sins;

as I shall explain in the second part. Therefore he acts cruelly and foolishly towards himself who does not at once free himself from the actual state of sin, or who intends committing sin in future: the inference that follows naturally from the premises. Christians! let none of us be so foolish! Such shall be the conclusion.

Help us to keep it, Christ Jesus! We ask Thee through the intercession of Mary and the holy guardian angels.

It wounds one deeply to be upbraided with a shameful act that cannot be denied.

There is no doubt that it causes most exquisite torture to be upbraided with what one is deeply ashamed of, and tries to hide in every possible way. But the torture is still worse when one cannot deny or excuse one's self for that which causes his shame, and when the accuser is a person of high authority, against whom no defence is possible, so that the only thing to do is to hang one's head in utter confusion. But the worst of all is, when the upbraiding is kept up for a long time, with bitter words and sarcastic laughter, and that under such circumstances the person upbraided is compelled to stand by and listen; this, I say, is so great a torture, that any honorable man would prefer to be beaten black and blue, rather than undergo it. Is it not so, my dear brethren? Some one says in company (and generally speaking, slanderous and uncharitable remarks about the faults of others form the staple of conversation): I know a certain person in town, whose name I will not mention, although he is well enough known, who has made a good deal of money in a rather unjust manner. What a shame for him! The man has no conscience, etc. I know one who is very frequent in his visits to such and such a person; it is easy to guess what he is after; he is a source of scandal to the whole neighborhood, etc. Now if, during a conversation of this kind, any one happens to be present who is addicted to any of those vices, and thinks that the remarks are intended for himself, how ashamed he must feel! He gets red and pale alternately, and wishes he were a hundred miles away from the place, although the person speaking may not even have thought of him. How much greater would not his shame and confusion be, if the uncharitable remarks were pointedly directed at him!

Shown by an example from Holy Scripture.

Imagine the state of Aman at the banquet given by Queen Esther to Assuerus. When they had eaten and drunk enough, Esther, at the king's command, made her request: "Give me my life for which I ask, and my people, for which I request;"[1] for

[1] Dona mihi animam meam, pro qua rogo, et populum meum, pro quo obsecro.—Esther vii. 3.

I and my people are to be slain. And, what is still worse, our enemy is in such a position that, acting as he does in the king's name, his cruelty will be ascribed to the king. Consider now, my dear brethren, what must have been the state of Aman's mind on hearing himself accused so unexpectedly. The king, wroth at what he heard, asked: "Who is this, and of what power, that he should do these things?"[1] The question was like a thunderbolt to Aman. But Esther answered: "It is this Aman that is our adversary and most wicked enemy."[2] How great must have been the confusion of Aman at hearing this answer! "Aman," says the Scripture, "hearing this, was forthwith astonished, not being able to bear the countenance of the king and of the queen."[3] Full of fear and shame and hardly conscious of what he was doing, he threw himself before Esther's couch, and would, no doubt, have rejoiced if he could have died on the spot. So intolerable is the torment caused by being upbraided with one's own shame.

A bad conscience is always reproaching the sinner with his wickedness.

Nearly every day, O sinner, you have to bear a similar torment, after having mortally offended your God, unless, indeed, you are one of those who are sunk in the very depths of depravity, and have become callous and obdurate. If you are not gone so far as that, then you will have torture and punishment enough to bear. You have within you, in your bad conscience, a devil that is by no means dumb; or, to speak better, your conscience is the devil that tortures you, by continually reproaching you with your shame in the bitterest terms; nor can you hear those reproaches without heartfelt anguish and confusion; and yet you are compelled to listen to them against your will. The moment you satisfy your brutal lusts, or your inordinate inclinations, and commit a sin, the tormenting demon is, as you must acknowledge, already there, and he calls out to you, as Pilate did to Christ, "what hast thou done?"[4] Miserable mortal, where are you going to? Whither have your blind desires led you? Shame upon you! If any honorable man knew what you have done, you would be covered with confusion! And yet the Almighty God has seen you while you were actually insulting Him, and trampling under foot His precious Blood. Is that your gratitude to Him for the countless gifts and graces He has bestowed on you? And what better are you now for what you have done, poor wretch that you are? And what has become of

[1] Quis est iste, et cujus potentiæ, ut haec audeat facere?—Esther vii. 5.
[2] Hostis et inimicus noster pessimus iste est Aman.—Ibid. 6.
[3] Quod ille audiens illico obstupuit vultum regis ac reginæ ferre non sustinens.—Ibid.
[4] Quid fecisti?—John xviii. 35.

your soul? It is sold to the devil for a vile and momentary pleasure, for a worthless thing! How can you dare any more to lift up your eyes to heaven? What has become of the merits of your former good works? You have lost them all in a moment. Where are now your so oft repeated protestations that you would rather die than offend God by mortal sin? How the devil must laugh at you, now that he has so easily ensnared you! And what must your angel guardian think of your conduct; for he was by your side when you so disgracefully forgot God and yourself, and, putting all honor and decency aside, sinned against the light of your own reason? Where is now your devotion to, your confidence in, the Mother of God? How can you dare to call her your Mother, after having so wickedly driven her most beloved Son out of your heart? Such are the bitter reproaches of your conscience when you have committed a sin. And that is according to what God said to Cain: "If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? But if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?"[1] That is to say, the remembrance of your sins will at once knock at the door of your heart, and will constantly cry out to you in tones of reproach, "what hast thou done?"

And he has nothing to urge in his excuse.

And what have you to say by way of defence? You cannot deny what you are accused of; your conscience brings it clearly before you; whether you will or not, you must acknowledge your guilt. In vain do you try to cloak your wickedness, or to allege false excuses for your sin. You may deceive men by them, but not yourself, your conscience speaks out plainly and distinctly; it cannot be deceived by flattery; and therefore you must hear it in silence, and bear your shame as best you can. You think perhaps, my sin was committed in secret, no one knows anything of it but myself and my associate in guilt, and I am certain that it will never be revealed, so that I can appear before men just as good as I was before, and they will have the same good opinion of me. True it is that, when you do wrong, you do not call in witnesses; and impurity, theft, and other shameful crimes are committed in the darkness of the night, and in hidden holes and corners, and are concealed from the eyes of men by a hypocritical appearance of piety; but tell me, asks S. Ambrose, "If you have no other witness of your sin, have you not the testimony of your own conscience?"[2] If no man knows of your guilt, it is known, at all events, to God and to yourself, and that is enough

[1] Nonne si bene egeris, recipies? sin autem male, statim in foribus peccatum aderit?—Gen. iv. 7.

[2] Si non habes conscium, annon habes conscientiæ testimonium?

to cause you to be tortured by the pangs of remorse. If men, angels, demons, nay, even God Himself, were to leave you in peace, you have within you a torturer whose bitter reproaches you must bear to your great confusion; and it is in that especially that the torment of a bad conscience consists, namely, that it annoys and troubles you alone and in secret.

Nor dare he seek consolation anywhere.

Nay, the fact that you dare not make known your trouble to others, rather increases, than lessens it. Every one who is afflicted seeks consolation from his friends and acquaintances, and relates to them in detail all that he has to suffer, and he is able to bear his trials far more courageously when he is aware that others sympathize with him. The bitterest trial of all is the secret of which one dares not complain, and which he must bear alone and unsupported. Thus it often happens that a man appears outwardly with a smiling countenance, while in the depths of his heart he is consumed with anguish. And so it is in reality with the sinner who is tortured by a bad conscience. Shame prevents him from making known his sufferings to any one. That others have a good opinion of him, instead of lessening, rather increases his torment; for his conscience continually cries out to him: See, men look upon you as good and pious, and you are in reality a slave of the devil! What must God think of you?

Nor can he free himself from the reproaches of conscience.

And how are you to get rid of those importunate upbraidings? Will you run away from them? But whither can you go? No matter where you are, or what you do, you have your conscience, that is your tormenting demon, always with you. Nor can you induce it to be still; for conscience is, so to speak, without shame; it cannot be persuaded by flattery, or bribed by gifts; it is insensible to kind, as well as to harsh words, and it persists in doing the office entrusted to it by God, namely, exhorting and tormenting the sinner. It is a thorn in his side, which causes acute pain, that no ointment or medicine can allay until the thorn is pulled out. In vain do you keep away from sermons, lest you should hear some allusion to your secret vices; and it generally is the case that they who have a bad conscience are very negligent in hearing the word of God, especially when they have reason to suspect that the truth will be told them; but I say, it is no use for you to try to save yourself in that way, for at home, in your own room, you have a preacher who tells you the truth about your sins better than any one else, and that preacher is your own conscience, which reproaches you with your wickedness all

the more bitterly because you try to avoid hearing what it has to say. When the bell rings for the sermon, your conscience says to you, Unhappy man that you are! You have gone so far now, that you dare not hear the word of God, which used to strengthen and comfort you in the divine service. In fact, do what you will, you cannot avoid the pangs of remorse, and at last you will be obliged, if you wish to get any rest at all, to make known your shame and your sin.

Shown by examples.

Surius relates in the Life of St. Medard, that a thief once stole from that Saint a fine ox, and, as the animal had a bell round its neck, the ringing of which might betray its whereabouts, the thief very carefully stuffed the bell with grass, and brought away the ox to his house. Hardly had he fastened the ox in the stable, when the bell commenced to ring of its own accord loud enough to be heard all over the place. The thief, in alarm, ran in at once to stop the bell, but he could not do so. At last he tore it off the neck of the ox, and hid it in his house, in a chest full of old clothes; but even then it continued making such a noise that the neighbors ran in to see what was the matter. Thus the guilty man was forced to make known the theft he had committed, to restore the ox to its owner, and to beg pardon most humbly for his crime. The same Surius, in his Life of St. Walburga, relates a still more remarkable incident. At Eichstadt in Germany there was a man who had killed his travelling companion, in order to rob him of his money; as he was raising the dead body on his shoulders to carry it to a safe place, where he could plunder it at his ease, the dead man locked his arms and legs so tightly around the murderer, that the latter could not free himself. All his plans to get rid of his loathsome burden proving fruitless, the unhappy man, at last driven to desperation, threw himself into the Rhine, intending to drown himself with the corpse of his victim. But not even this plan succeeded; for the waters rejected him, and threw him back again on the bank. Thus he who was anxious to die was forced, against his will, to live, tied to a dead body. Consider, my dear brethren, what a miserable state the poor wretch must have been in. For a time he wandered about with his ghastly burden among the forests and caves of the mountains, in order to avoid the sight of men; but at last he was unable to bear the fearful stench of the putrifying body, and he went to the grave of St. Walburga, where he confessed to a priest the murder of which he was guilty and of which he had to carry the proof about with him,

and thus he was enabled to get rid of the dead body of his victim at the grave of the Saint.

Until he is at last compelled to disclose his shame in confession.

Better examples than those, my dear brethren, could hardly be imagined to show how remorse tortures the bad conscience. As soon as a mortal sin is committed the conscience commences to ring at once like a bell, and to cry out, what have you done? and, as God says by the Prophet Ezechiel, "Do thou also bear thy confusion;"[1] of which text St. Jerome says, "he who is tortured by his own conscience, bears his torment about with him."[2] How many plans the sinner resorts to, in order to stop the ringing of this bell, and to free himself from the heavy and loathsome burden of his own conscience! But all to no purpose. He goes into company in order to divert his mind from its troubles; he tries to steal away the time, as it were, from his cares and to conceal his anguish from the eyes of men by all kinds of amusements, feasting, and dancing; but in the very midst of his pleasures he hears the bell that cannot be silenced. His smiling countenance, his outward gayety, are only a cloak to hide the trouble and uneasiness that are gnawing at his heart, which is groaning and sighing under a heavy burden. He tries to stop the bell with clothes and feathers, that is, he hopes to stifle his conscience for a time by indulging in excessive sleep; but even in his dreams he cannot get rid of the cares that oppress him; as king David testifies of himself after he had fallen into sin, "I slept troubled;"[3] "There is no peace for my bones because of my sins."[4] Sometimes the sinner thinks that he will silence the voice of conscience, and get rid of his trouble by putting off his confession for months and years, or, what is still worse, by concealing in confession the shameful sin that causes him remorse; but he only makes matters worse; for the bell rings louder, the burden becomes heavier on account of the additional guilt of sacrilege. He then tries another plan, and imagines that outward acts of devotion, or long prayers, or almsgiving, will quiet his uneasy conscience; but here too he is mistaken, and his remorse is only increased, for he is continually reminded that his prayers and devotions are not sincere, since he has not honestly made his peace with God. No matter what efforts he may make otherwise to find peace, he will at last be forced, like the thief and the murderer, to disclose his own

[1] Et tu porta confusionem tuam.—Ezech. xvi. 52.
[2] Portat tormentum suum, qui propria torquetur conscientia.
[3] Dormivi conturbatus.—Ps. lvi. 5.
[4] Non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum.—Ps. xxxvii. 4.

shame, to make known his sin in confession, and penitently and humbly to beg pardon for it. If he refuses to do that, he will never be freed from his torments.

Foolish, then, is the sinner to expose himself to such torment. Shown by a simile.

How painful it must be for a soul to be thus perpetually tortured! According to the wise man, "It is better to dwell in a wilderness, than with a quarrelsome and passionate woman;"[1] and I can easily imagine that such is the case; but is it not a still more unbearable torment to have to dwell with a bad conscience, that is always reproaching you? O sinner! are you not really mad and out of your senses to expose yourself to such lasting and intolerable torture, and to forfeit the grace and friendship of God for the sake of some momentary pleasure, or trifling gain, or short-lived gratification of your evil desires? In the Arctic Ocean whales are sometimes seen writhing with pain as they swim on the top of the water, until at length, driven, as it were, to desperation, they rush toward the shore and allow themselves to fall an easy prey to the fishermen. They had no outward traces of wounds or sickness, nor do they seem to be flying from an enemy; the sea is calm, the wind still, and yet they are evidently tormented by something they cannot defend themselves against, or get rid of, because it is within them. It appears that there is in those regions a kind of bird, similar in size and appearance to our raven, and furnished with a long, sharp beak; when it finds the mouth of the whale open, it flies into its huge stomach and gradually gnaws away its heart and entrails. Frequently birds of this kind have been seen to come alive out of the open carcasses of whales. Thus a huge creature is forced to submit to a small bird, and to nourish and feed in its own body the enemy that gnaws away its life, although it is otherwise so strong that it can easily overcome any animal that attacks it by mere strength. It matters little to our purpose whether this story is true or false, for there is no doubt that it represents the remorse that gnaws at the conscience of him who is in the state of mortal sin, and shows how, in the midst of the apparent happiness and pleasures he enjoys, his heart is full of care and trouble; for, as St. Ambrose says, "the unreasoning sins of the soul gnaw at the mind and feelings of the sinner, and eat away the entrails, as it were, of his conscience."[2] If the whale were to seek for the bird and deliberately to allow it to

[1] Melius est habitare in terra deserta, quam cum muliere rixosa et iracunda.—Prov. xxi. 19.

[2] Irrationabilia animæ peccata mentem rei sensumque compungunt et quædam exedunt viscera conscientiæ.—S. Ambrose in Luc. l. vii. c. 14.

enter his stomach, then it would only serve him right, although there would be some excuse for such a foolish proceeding in an unreasoning animal; but you, O man, who know very well how sin plagues and torments you and gnaws at your heart, how can you so readily and even laughingly swallow down the forbidden morsel that you know will cause you such suffering, for the sake of a momentary pleasure? whom have you to blame but yourself? And, indeed, according to the philosopher Seneca, you richly deserve the punishment you have brought on yourself. "The first and greatest punishment of the sinner is sin, nor does any crime go unpunished, for every crime is its own punishment,"[1] since it is always reproaching the sinner. But the torment of a bad conscience does not end here, for, besides its bitter upbraiding, it threatens the sinner with eternal damnation as his final destiny, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

A prisoner is greatly troubled when sentence of death is passed on him.

While a prisoner is being tried and his case still under examination, he is full of anxiety as to how it will end; but if the judge passes sentence of death on him, his fear and terror know no bounds, as all those who have to prepare such prisoners for death know by experience. No matter how resigned they may have been before to the will of God, so that one might think that there would not be the least trouble in preparing them for death, when the fatal sentence is announced to them, they change at once, and give way to extreme anguish and despair, so that one can hardly dare to speak to them. They brood over their fate, and neither know what they are saying themselves, nor understand what is said to them, and if their terror allows them to sleep, they dream of nothing but the sword, the wheel, or the gallows that is to deprive them of life.

A sinner is always troubled in the same way

See, O sinner, how it is with you, when you have within you the tormenting demon of a bad conscience. It not only reproaches you with your shame, but also reminds you that sentence of death, and of eternal death, too, has been passed on you. You are lost! it says; you have deserved death! As long as you are in this state, you are doomed to destruction! Sentence is passed on you already; away to hell, to eternal fire! When you hear the roar of the thunder and see the flash of the lightning, you are filled with anguish by the voice of conscience, which cries

[1] Prima et maxima pœna peccantium est peccasse, nec ullum scelus impunitum est quoniam sceleris in scelere supplicium est.—Seneca, ep. 97 ad Lucil.

out to you, take care, an angry God is about to take vengeance on you! A thunder-bolt will fall on you; the lightning will strike you! Will you not now at least remember that there is an all-powerful God, whom you must fear, and whom you have hitherto so grossly insulted? If a pestilence attacks the city, and hurries off numbers of the people to their graves, your conscience fills you with terror. Alas! it says, what will become of you? Death is at your very door! Do you think you can escape the calamity from which so many good and pious people have suffered? It is you and such as you who have been the cause of this calamity, and what would become of you if you were now to fall sick and die? If you happen to hear of an accident, for instance, that poor man who was in perfect health when he went to bed last night, was found dead this morning; or, another man died in a quarter of an hour from a fit of apoplexy; or, that woman fell down and broke her neck; all these things are apt to fill you with mortal terror. Ah, your conscience says to you, you deserve that fate better than that man or that woman! Who knows what may happen to you this very day? If you chance, even against your will, to be present at a sermon which treats of death, or hell, or the judgment of God, you are terror-stricken; every word you hear seems to confirm the sentence of your eternal damnation. If your secret vice is even faintly alluded to, your conscience is at once on the alert; that is meant for me, you think; what business has the preacher to speak so pointedly at me? If you remain away from the sermon, your conscience is alarmed at the sound of the bell which gives the signal for it; there, it says, you have a clear proof of your eternal reprobation, since you avoid the word of God, which could bring you to repentance. So true are the words of the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom, "For whereas wickedness is fearful, it beareth witness of its condemnation; for a troubled conscience always forecasteth grievous things."[1]

Nay, he even imagines that lifeless creatures condemn him: shown from Holy Scripture.

Yes, says St. Chrysostom, he who is plagued by a bad conscience often imagines that even lifeless creatures, the stones, the wall, and the shadows on it are so many voices that pronounce sentence on him; he is like a poor prisoner who, when he hears the least noise at his cell door, imagines that he is to be led forth at once to execution, although the noise may be merely the howling of the wind. The Holy Scripture gives us a striking

[1] Cum sit enim timida nequitia, dat testimonium condemnationis; semper enim præsumit sæva perturbata conscientia.—Wis. xvii. 10.

proof of this in the wicked King Baltassar, as we read in the Book of Daniel. Baltassar was seated at table surrounded by the nobles of his kingdom, when, in the midst of his revelry, he suddenly grew pale: "Then was the king's countenance changed, and the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees struck one against the other,"[1] and he cried out in dread, so that all who heard him were alarmed. And what was the matter? What had frightened him? "There appeared fingers, as it were of the hand of a man, writing over against the candlestick upon the surface of the wall of the king's palace; and the king beheld the joints of the hand that wrote."[2] But, asks St. John Chrysostom, why should he be so frightened at the sight of a hand? What could a bare hand do against a mighty monarch surrounded by his satellites, and having at his command a whole army to defend his life against all attacks? If, instead of a hand, he had seen an armed giant, or a grisly spectre threatening him with a sword, he would have had some reason for alarm; but he saw nothing more terrible than the bare shadow or figure of a hand, not armed with a sword, but merely writing on the wall. And what did it write? Three little words, that the king did not even understand. What reason had he then for giving way to such excessive terror? It was not the hand, says St. Chrysostom, that frightened him, but his bad conscience, which made him suspect, what was really the case, that the hand was writing on the wall the sentence of death which his conscience had already pronounced on him. "For whereas wickedness is fearful, it beareth witness of its condemnation."

Confirmed by other examples.

There are countless examples of the same kind: Theodoric, king of Italy, nearly fainted with fright when he saw a fish brought to table, thinking it was the head of Symmachus, whom he had caused to be put to death, that was coming open-mouthed to devour him. When Henry VIII., king of England, was on his death-bed, he thought that those who were standing round were the religious whom he had banished or put to death, and who were coming to summon him before the judgment-seat of God. The emperor Constantius imagined that every shadow he saw was the ghost of his murdered brother, quaffing to him a goblet full of blood. Persus destroyed all the swallows' nests he could find, and killed the birds themselves, because he

[1] Tunc facies regis commutata est. Compages renum ejus solvebantur, et genua ejus ad se invicem collidebantur.—Dan. v. 6.

[2] Apparuerunt digiti quasi manus hominis scribentis contra candelabrum in superficie parietis aulæ regiæ; et rex aspiciebat articulos manus scribentis.—Ibid. 5.

thought that they were always accusing him of having murdered his father. Thus, "whereas wickedness is fearful it beareth witness of its condemnation." And this is the punishment that God threatens to inflict on sin, as we read in Deuteronomy: "If thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep and to do all His commandments. . . . the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness. Thou shalt fear night and day, neither shalt thou trust thy life. In the morning thou shalt say: who will grant me evening? and at evening, who will grant me morning? for the fearfulness of the heart, wherewith thou shalt be terrified."[1] This is the torment of which St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil."[2] It is the torment of which St. Augustine says that "amongst all the tribulations that can afflict the human soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience."[3] Nay, if you wish to have, while still on earth, some idea of the torments of hell, then learn what it is to have a bad conscience. Ask king David how his tortured him; he will tell you: "There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones because of my sins. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I walked sorrowful all the day long. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart."[4] "My sin is always before me."[5] The adultery and murder that I have committed are always before my mind.

Even of the most wicked men.

Perhaps you may think that, because David had, before he sinned, a good and tender conscience, it is no wonder that he felt the sting of remorse so keenly afterwards? Ask, then, another, who was sunk in the very depths of depravity; Luther, I mean, who cast all honor and shame to the winds, who feared neither God nor man, who bid defiance to spiritual and temporal authority, to princes and potentates; and you will find that even he

[1] Quod si audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui, ut custodias et facias omnia mandata ejus. . . . dabit enim tibi Dominus ibi cor pavidum, et deficientes oculos, et animam consumtam mœrore. Timebis nocte et die, et non credes vitæ tuæ. Mane dices: quis mihi det vesperum? et vespere: quis mihi det mane? propter cordis tui formidinem, qua terreberis. —Deut. xxviii. 15, 65-67.

[2] Tribulatio et angustia in omnem animam hominis operantis malum. —Rom. ii. 9.

[3] Inter omnes tribulationes humanæ animæ nulla major est, quam conscientia delictorum.

[4] Non est sanitas in carne mea a facie iræ tuæ; non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum. Miser factus sum, et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar. Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei. —Ps. xxxvii. 4, 7, 9.

[5] Peccatum meum contra me est semper.—Ps. l. 5.

could not escape the tortures of remorse. Every day he indulged to excess in the pleasures of the table, hoping thereby to silence the reproaches of his conscience, but in vain. Hear his own words on this subject, as they are given by Ulenberg, his biographer: "Because I sometimes appear cheerful, people think I lead a happy life; but God sees what kind of a life I lead."[1] He confessed to his friend Pomeranus that it was impossible to describe the mental anguish he suffered. You may read of people whose hair turned suddenly gray through remorse of conscience. Such was the case with Louis the Severe, whose hair turned gray in a single night through remorse at a murder he was guilty of; so that, although he was quite a young man, he looked next morning as if he were seventy years old. You will find examples of people who, to get rid of the tortures of remorse, made away with themselves by hanging themselves to a bed post, or piercing their hearts with a dagger, or cutting their throats, or drowning themselves, etc. Thus they preferred to go straight to hell, rather than bear any longer the torment of a bad conscience. So true is it that "amongst all the tribulations that can afflict the human soul, there is none greater than a bad conscience."

Conclusion and exhortation to leave the state of sin at once, and to avoid sin in future.

Sinners, to you I address my conclusion in the words of St. Paul to the Romans, "what fruit therefore had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?"[2] Tell me, pray, what advantage have you gained by incurring the guilt of sin in the sight of God? What remains to you now of the past and momentary pleasure in which you sought your gratification? What have you gained by concealing that abominable sin in confession? You know now by your own experience, although you may not show it outwardly, what the result of your sin is, and it is nothing else but secret shame, anguish, and remorse of conscience, a hell upon earth. Are you not cruel towards yourselves in thus burdening your minds with such intolerable anguish? Are you not foolish in deferring repentance, when you can at once free yourselves from the miserable state in which you are? But perhaps you think I am exaggerating; perhaps you do not feel this torture so keenly? I know that not every sinner suffers from remorse in the same degree; there are some who suffer more, and others, less; according as their consciences are tender,

[1] Quia me hilarem nonnunquam exhibeo putant me jucundam vitam ducere, sed Deus perspectam habet morum meorum rationem.—Ulenberg, in Vita Lutheri, c. 19.

[2] Quem ergo fructum habuistis tunc in illis, in quibus nunc erubescitis?—Rom. vi. 21.

or hardened; in the same way, too, there are some vices that cause more shame than others; and finally, time lessens remorse to a certain extent; yet there is hardly any one who does not feel it in some degree or other. But if there is any one who, after having committed grievous sin, feels no uneasiness, nor remorse, then, alas! I need say no more to him, for he is evidently hardened in wickedness and abandoned by God; and that is the greatest punishment, next to eternal damnation, that can be inflicted on sin, as we shall see on another occasion. But if you still feel your consciences uneasy, oh, then thank God, and drive away the tormenting demon at once by sincere repentance and amendment! Do not think the worse of preachers or confessors if they reprove your vices sharply and try to deter you from sin by describing the malice of it. They mean well with you, and their object is either to save you from falling into sin and from thus incurring the tortures of remorse, or to free you from the state of sin, if you are already in it. For my part, I could not endure such torment for a moment, and I believe that, if there was no other punishment for sin but an uneasy conscience, I should try to avoid all sin with the greatest care; and if there was no other reward for a virtuous life, but the peace of mind that a good conscience brings, that alone would be enough to induce me to try to do the holy will of God in all things. So it is, pious Christians! and let this be your conclusion: do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the false and merely apparent happiness of sinners; serve your God faithfully, and enjoy in the possession of the highest good that peace which surpasses all worldly joys, and is a foretaste of the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the second Sunday after Easter.

Text.

Vocem meam audient.—John. x. 16.
"They shall hear My voice."

This is the difference between the chosen sheep of Jesus Christ and the reprobate goats that are condemned to hell; the former, after having been brought to the true fold, hear the voice of their Good Shepherd, and endeavor to follow it always; while the latter, at the first difficulty or temptation, allow themselves to be scattered and devoured by the hellish wolf. By these latter I mean those sinners who, after having been converted to God

by true penance, do not remain faithful, but relapse easily into their former sins, and thus again take sides with the devil. I now beg of them to remember how wretched they were when in the state of sin, and, if they love themselves, not to inflict on themselves the pain and torture they had to suffer before; for there is no doubt that they will have experienced the truth of what God says in the Book of Deuteronomy, "But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God, . . . the Lord will give thee a fearful heart, and a soul consumed with pensiveness."[1] Will you not hear the voice of the Good Shepherd? Then you must, in spite of yourself, hear another voice, which will incessantly torment and fill you with anguish. And what voice is that? The voice of your own bad conscience, a torment that has not its like on earth; so that we have therein a very good reason to avoid all sin, as I shall now show to your salutary warning,—*continues as above.*

SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE FALSE PEACE OF A SINFUL CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

How and by what means people are wont to falsify and pervert their own judgment and conscience, so that, although the conscience is in a bad state, yet it remains in peace and quiet.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthias, Apostle.*

Text.

Et invenietis requiem animabus vestris.—Matt. xi. 29.
"And you shall find rest to your souls."

Introduction.

Oh, certainly sweet is the yoke, and light the burden, that he bears who, desirous of his eternal salvation, earnestly seeks to keep his conscience free from sin in the service of Jesus Christ, and to remain always in the friendship of God! Such a man finds out by experience the truth of the promise of Jesus Christ, "Take up My yoke upon you and you shall find rest to your souls." And in reality he enjoys a sweet peace of soul, than

[1] Quodsi audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui . . . dabit tibi Dominus ibi cor pavidum, et animam consumptam mœrore.—Deut. xxviii. 15, 65.

which there can be no greater in this life, and in which he may confidently rejoice in the Lord at all times, with his whole heart. Pious and just Christian; I congratulate you a thousand times! Continue with confidence to enjoy that consolation which is a mystery to the blind world and its infatuated children! Sinners! deplorable indeed is your condition, for you cannot have the least share in that consolation, as long as you are enemies of God, and in the state of sin. The intolerable torment of remorse, of which I have spoken elsewhere, is the miserable portion that sin has left you! Ah, should not even this fact be enough to induce you to leave at once the wretched state in which you are, that you may again participate in the peace and consolation of the children of God? Yet, as long as you feel the sting of remorse, you are, so to speak, the best amongst sinners; for there is still hope that your uneasy conscience will, as it were, compel you to repent and amend your lives. The worst and most wretched amongst you I can justly call those who, like you, are under the yoke of the devil and yet imagine that they are living in peace and contentment. They imagine, I say; for there are Christians who are in a bad state as to their souls, since they have sinned grievously against certain commandments of God, and who, in order to preserve their peace of mind, have recourse to many false arguments and pretexts to deceive their conscience, to falsify and pervert their judgment, and thus to persuade themselves that evil is good and lawful. These people do not act honestly towards God and their own souls; they have deliberately falsified and deceived their own conscience, and consequently their peace of mind is only a false and deceitful one, with which they are hurrying on blindly to eternal ruin. The heartfelt pity I have for such souls impels me to give this exhortation, in which I shall explain

Plan of Discourse.

How and by what means people are wont to falsify and pervert their own judgment and conscience, so that, although the conscience is in a bad state, yet it remains in peace and quiet. Such is the whole subject, to the end that they who act honestly with God, if they see that they do not belong to this class of sinners, may be all the more confirmed in true peace of conscience; and that the others, having acknowledged the deceit they are guilty of, may enter on a better and a safe road to heaven, and take on themselves the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ.

Grant both those ends, O Jesus Christ, by Thy powerful grace, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary Thy Mother, and the holy guardian angels.

Although the conscience never allows itself to be deceived when there is question of sin.

But what am I saying? How is it possible to enjoy peace of mind by deceiving one's own conscience? Is it really possible for a man by any effort of lying craft so to deceive his conscience, that it can no longer tell him the truth, and looks on evil as good, and sin as lawful? Is not the conscience, as St. John Chrysostom says, an impartial, just, and truthful judge, that cannot be deceived by bribes or flattery, nor terrified by contradictions or threats? A judge who cannot be reduced to silence, as I have explained already when speaking of the torments of remorse; who cries out continually to the sinner, against the sinner's own will, what have you done? you have offended God and made Him your enemy; you are a child of the devil, and are doomed to eternal ruin, etc.; who, when one is on the point of doing something unlawful, cries out, as St. John the Baptist did to Herod, "It is not lawful;"[1] what you are intending to do is wrong! The way in which you make money is unlawful; you incur eternal punishment by your acts of injustice! It is unlawful for you not to pay your debts when you can, and to turn away from your door your laborers, your tradesmen, and the shopkeepers with whom you deal, and to refuse them what is due to them! It is unlawful for you to spend so much on unnecessary luxuries, entertainments, and dress, so that you have nothing left to give the poor! Woman, that irregular, useless, idle life you are leading will never bring you to heaven; you are walking on the broad road that leads to hell! That perpetual visiting, those gambling habits of yours, for the sake of which you neglect your domestic cares, that carelessness in training your children, which is the occasion of their learning worldly vanity and being introduced to all sorts of dangerous company; all that is unlawful! you are damning yourself as well as your children! Son! daughter! you are making too free with that person; you are doing wrong! The occasion of sin must be cut off; it is not lawful for you to dress in that scandalous fashion; if you do not amend in that particular you cannot enter the narrow gate of heaven, etc.

Yet the sinner finds all sorts of excuses for sin, that he

It is true, my dear brethren, that at first conscience cries out in that way to every one who is guilty of sin; but what can one do to silence this voice of conscience, and to free himself from

[1] Non licet.—Matt. xiv. 4.

the tortures of remorse? Self-love supplies all kinds of pretexts and false arguments to pervert a man's judgment and to persuade him that there is nothing wrong in what he is going to do, that it is even good and praiseworthy. It refers him to the example of others, who do the same thing without being ashamed of it; it encourages him to follow the advice of those who are ready to approve of everything that pleases him; it consoles him by reminding him of the devotions he is in the habit of practising, and that are generally performed for the glory of God and the salvation of one's soul; it allows him to be blinded by his own passions and evil inclinations; it distracts him by temporal cares and worldly business, and prevents him from watching over himself and attending to the all-important affairs of his soul; and thus it brings him at last to such a state that he imagines he is on the sure way to heaven, and that he can continue in the mode of life to which he has grown accustomed. In this way one may lead a thoroughly un-Christian life, and yet find peace of mind. But since the conscience is deceived and betrayed, that peace is only a false one, that will surely bring with it, if not in this life, at least in the next, the gnawing worm of remorse.

may keep his conscience quiet.

The first pretext, then, is the example of others, or the general custom. We see others doing wrong things without scruple or shame, and as we are inclined to do the same things, we allow our judgment to be perverted, look upon sin as lawful, and thus enjoy peace by deceiving our consciences. Long ago Our Lord reproached the Scribes and Pharisees with this gross error, when He accused them of appealing to the example of their forefathers by way of excuse for the grievous sins of injustice and uncharity of which they were guilty: "But He, answering, said to them: why do you also transgress the commandment of God for your tradition?"[1] You, hypocrites that you are, say that what your fathers have done you also must observe. But woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, that try to deceive yourselves in that way! And, my dear brethren, do we not find nowadays amongst ourselves similar pretexts and excuses, that people try to make available by a sort of prescriptive right almost, against the most important commandments of God? Who is there now who makes the least scruple of anything, if he can say of it, it is the fashion; it is the common custom; it is what people do nowadays in the world; others like me do it, and he

First pretext: the common custom of men.

[1] Ipse autem respondens, ait illis: quare et vos transgredimini mandatum Dei propter traditionem vestram.—Matt. xv. 3.

who acts otherwise is looked down upon, and cannot get on in the world; there can be no harm in that which is done by every one? This, says St. Augustine, is what most people appeal to, when they think, "will God send every one to hell for that?"[1] And thus they flatter themselves that they are not doing wrong, and their consciences remain undisturbed.

It is a most grievous error, for no custom can make lawful to me what is forbidden by the law of God.

But, my dear brethren, what a grievous mistake we make in this matter, to the eternal ruin of our souls! Answer me this question: Does the law of God, that prescribes humility, modesty, Christian charity, temperance and abstemiousness, purity, self-denial, mortification of the senses; the law of God that forbids all pride, vanity, scandal-giving, revenge, hatred and enmity, gluttony and drunkenness, usury and unjust gains, impure love and all incontinence, etc.; does this law hold good only for a time, and in certain circumstances? or does it apply to all times and all circumstances? The good that this law commands, the evil it forbids, is it not always good or evil in itself? There is not a doubt of it, because the law of God that forbids us to do evil is founded on the law of nature. It is evident, then, that neither fashion, nor custom, nor the example of others, can make good and lawful that which is condemned by the law of God as bad and unlawful. No, no custom in the world can excuse me from grievous sin if, as many do, I were deliberately to deprive myself of the use of reason by excessive drinking. No custom can justify me if, as many do, I try to make unjust gains, or to keep unjustly what belongs to others by usury, or cheating in my business, trade, or profession, or in law-suits in which I am engaged. No custom on earth can make me to dress, as many do, in such a vain and luxurious style as to be to innocent souls an occasion of sin. No custom can make it lawful for me to return evil for evil, as many do, and to seek revenge for insults offered me. No custom can permit me to go into the proximate occasion of sin, or to keep up a sinful intercourse with a person of the opposite sex. No custom can excuse me if, like many parents, I train up my children to every worldly vanity; and the same is to be said of everything that is forbidden by the law of God. If I do or omit anything against that law, then I, and all who do or omit the same, are guilty of sin; and if I do not repent and amend my life, I and all who act like me, even if the whole world did it, will be lost eternally. There is not the least doubt of that. For if it were

[1] Numquid omnes perditurus est Deus?

not so, most vices would cease to be vices and would become quite lawful; since, alas, many vices have become so common, that they are looked on as fashionable and as matters of course.

But some may perhaps think, at least, there is some excuse for me, and a merciful God will not look on my sins as so grievous, since I only conform to the custom and example of others. No, Christians! you are quite wrong. The contrary is the case; your sin is all the greater and more inexcusable, the more common and fashionable it is; it offers a greater insult to God, since you disregard him for the sake of following the general custom, and it cries out more piercingly to heaven for vengeance, and compels a just God to punish the world. "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied," says the Holy Scripture, "and their sin is become exceedingly grievous."[1] If there had been in those wicked cities even a few, twenty, fifty, or a hundred, who were free from the abominable vice of impurity, God in His mercy would have spared the cities, as He Himself said to Abraham: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten."[2] But because the sin was general, all the inhabitants were destroyed by fire from heaven. To say, therefore, others like me do this or that; it is the fashion or custom; I must do as others do; is the same as saying, others offend the great God; it is the fashion and custom to despise Him, and to trample His law under foot, and I, too, will despise and offend Him. Is not that increasing the malice of the sin, and making the vice more grievous?

I am guilty of contemning God more grievously when I follow the custom in unlawful things.

Far different is the conclusion you should draw, according to the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."[3] Redeeming the time, because the days are evil, wherefore become not unwise; but understanding what is the will of God;"[4] that is to say, since there are so many in the world who lead wicked lives, you, at least, ought to live piously, and do the will of God in all things as far as you can. If the air is full of pestilence, so that numbers of people die, you have to be all the more careful if you wish to escape the same fate. Now the whole world is full of vices, and most men are addicted to one vice or another, in accordance with the prevailing fashion, and therefore

Therefore I am all the more bound to avoid such customs.

[1] Clamor Sodomorum et Gomorrhæ multiplicatus est, et peccatum eorum aggravatum est nimis.—Gen. xviii. 20.

[2] Non delebo propter decem.—Ibid. 32.

[3] Nolite communicare operibus infructuosis tenebrarum, magis autem redarguite.—Ephes. v. 11.

[4] Redimentes tempus, quoniam dies mali sunt; propterea nolite fieri imprudentes, sed intelligentes quæ sit voluntas Dei.—Ibid. 16, 17.

you have to be all the more careful, so as not to be, like them, unfaithful to God, that you may escape the eternal damnation that they incur, and may save your soul with the chosen few. It is useless, then, to appeal to the custom and example of others in order to excuse your sin and to set your conscience at rest; for by so doing you falsify your conscience, and gain only a deceitful peace of mind.

Second pretext: the advice of those who approve of all we do.

The next pretext by which the conscience is deceived, is grounded on the advice of certain individuals whom one consults, when in doubt, to find out whether it is lawful to make a profit by doing business in such or such a way, or whether one is bound to restitution in a certain case or not, whether one ought to leave that house, that companion, or to abandon that person, whether one is bound under pain of sin to avoid that worldly fashion, and so on. Very often in cases of this kind the troubled conscience cries out, it is not lawful! If you do so, you commit sin! And how can one manage to get rid of all uneasiness, and at the same time to retain his former habit of injustice, impurity, or worldliness? He looks out for a confessor, or some one else, who apparently is experienced in matters of conscience; but what kind of a one does he look for? For one whom he knows to be truthful and outspoken, and who will tell him plainly what the law of God and the claim of conscience require? Not at all! He does not want an advice of that kind. But he seeks for one whom he will be able to persuade by flimsy arguments to give him advice that will be pleasing to him: one who, as he knows by experience, will let him off easily, and will approve of the mode of action that he is inclined to follow. But if the first adviser is not satisfactory, if he is somewhat too severe, then another is sought, who will deal with the matter more leniently, and say, O yes, you are allowed to do that; there is no grievous obligation in the case; you need not be uneasy, etc. And thus the troubled conscience is set at rest, the former custom or habit is persevered in, and there is no danger of the torments of remorse.

In this way, too, we deceive ourselves.

Alas, God help you! you have thoroughly deceived and betrayed your own conscience. "Thy prophets," as Jeremias says, "have seen false and foolish things for thee, and they have not laid open thy iniquity, to excite thee to penance; but they have seen for thee false revelations;"[1] they have told you noth-

[1] Prophetæ tui viderunt tibi falsa et stulta, nec aperiebant iniquitatem tuam, ut te ad pœnitentiam provocarent; viderunt autem tibi assumptiones falsas.—Lament. ii. 14.

ing but lies, or rather you wished to hear nothing else from them; you have deliberately looked for a prophet who would not tell you the plain truth, but would help you to excuse your sins and vices, so that you should not be obliged to repent of them. Do you think that you will be able in that way to excuse your sins at the judgment-seat of God, who searches the reins and the heart? you will find out later on, and you will see that you have not dealt honestly with your conscience. For if that pretext were available, we should again have to erase most vices from the list of sins, because there is hardly one of them that will not find a patron and protector to excuse it, and approve of it, either through ignorance, or thoughtlessness, or not understanding the thing properly, or flattery, or cowardice, or human respect, that prevents him from answering according to the truth. Alas, how often consciences are deceived in this way, even in the confessional! And hence it is that frequently no restitution is made of ill-gotten goods, nor atonement for injustice, nor the injured fame of another made good, nor the proximate occasion of sin avoided, nor sinful and scandalous abuses laid aside, and men continue in their sinful habits until the end of their lives, without scruple or uneasiness, and with peace of conscience; but it is a false and deceitful peace.

Third pretext: our own evil inclinations.

The third pretext for falsifying the conscience comes from our own evil inclinations and passions, which pervert the judgment and blind the understanding, so that we refuse to acknowledge our obligation, or at least to look on it as serious, in many matters of duty, either because we find a difficulty in them, or because they are opposed to our natural inclinations. In this way we act like a drunken man who is unable to discern good from evil, and who runs open-eyed into danger without seeing where he is going; and if any one beats or strikes him, he is incapable of feeling the pain of the blows until the next morning. This is always the case with those who allow themselves to be led astray by their unmortified passions and evil inclinations; and the Prophet Joel says to such people: "Awake, ye that are drunk;"[1] while St. Augustine, speaking in their person says: "Everything is good as long as it suits our inclination."[2]

It is alleged for almost every vice.

A passionate, vindictive man can hardly bear the sight of one who has injured or insulted him; a thousand schemes of revenge run through his head every day; wherever he goes he has not

[1] Expergiscimini ebrii.—Joel i. 5.
[2] Omne quodcumque volumus, bonum est.

a good word for his enemy, but heaps curses and maledictions on him, and slanders him in every possible manner; and what does his conscience say to him about all those sins? Sins? He never thinks of them as sinful; he imagines he has a perfect right to act in that way, and that his own honor and good name require him to do so. An avaricious man will hardly see any sin in being very stingy towards the poor, in trying to gain a law-suit unjustly by bribery, in allowing himself to be bribed to hold his tongue when he ought to speak, or to speak when he ought to hold his tongue; in a word, every contract or matter of business that offers him a chance of making a profit is sure to be good and lawful in his sight; while he claims credit from God for his avarice, which he looks upon as a praiseworthy and necessary economy, as a proof of his fatherly prudence in providing for his children. What does an impure man think of undue familiarity with the opposite sex, of the evil thoughts and desires that fill his heart, of the double-meaning expressions and impure conversation he indulges in, of the signs and gestures he makes, contrary to Christian modesty? He makes very light of those things; they are only ordinary acts of courtesy or friendliness, such as are in common use amongst men; there is no sin in them, unless they are carried to extravagant lengths, and even then they look on the sin as the result of human weakness, that deserves the pity rather than the anger of God. The woman whose mind and manners are in thorough conformity with the vanity of the world thinks it no sin to appear in church and at the Table of the Lord, dressed in luxurious and extravagant style; nor to have her hair dressed by a person of the opposite sex; nor to bring up her daughters to the same vanities, and allow them to go into dangerous company; nor to waste part of the day in sleep, and the rest in dressing, while the evenings are devoted to visiting and gambling, and household cares are neglected, as well as the Christian training of her children. All these things are utterly opposed to the duties of a Christian life, and to the obligations of her state; but what does she care for that? She does not even think it worth her while to mention them in confession, much less to repent of and avoid them. In fact, she is so blinded by passion, that she looks upon that incessant visiting and the habit of gambling as virtues, inasmuch as she pretends that thereby she can avoid idleness and uncharitable talk, as well as other sins, while mutual friendship, love, and charity are fostered, etc.; her extravagance in dress

she considers a matter of necessity, in order to please her husband, etc. Once we have a desire for a thing, it must be good. And people in this state go frequently to confession and Holy Communion without scruple or shame; they imagine even that they are very pious and good if they are constant in the performance of certain outward works of devotion, and their consciences are at rest. But, O deplorable blindness! "woe to you that call evil good;"[1] and are so blinded by your passions, that you try to turn vices into lawful customs! It is a false conscience, that causes a false peace of mind, and it will not be able to deceive God; for, as St. Jerome says: "that calm is a storm."[2]

The fourth pretext comes from carelessness and sloth in what concerns our eternal salvation. Thus there are people who hardly think of examining their actions once a week, to see whether they are good or evil; they take no trouble to learn the duties and obligations of their state; they seldom or never come to sermons or instructions in which those duties might be explained to them; from morning till night they are distracted with all sorts of worldly occupations, and they hardly ever think of the presence of God; they gratify their senses to the full in all things, and thus commit hundreds of sins that they take no notice of; and withal, if they hear holy Mass on Sundays and holydays, observe the usual fasts, commit no murder, adultery, or manifest injustice, confess their sins four times a year, say a part of the Rosary, or the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin, or some confraternity prayers every day, they imagine that they are in a very good state, and so they live on, with their consciences at rest, and without remorse or anxiety. Nor is there any reason to be surprised at that. They commit sins enough; but since they take no notice of them through carelessness, wilful and culpable ignorance, and deliberate avoidance of the light and the encouragement they might receive by hearing the word of God, which is so necessary for them, they cannot arouse or disturb their slumbering consciences, and they remain in that way of which the Wise Man says, "There is a way which seemeth just to a man; but the ends thereof lead to death."[3]

The fourth pretext comes from want of watchfulness over ourselves.

O holy servants of God, whose relics are publicly venerated on our altars, how differently you lived when on earth! How

The saints acted quite differently.

[1] Væ qui dicitis malum bonum.—Isa. v. 20.

[2] Tranquillitas ista tempestas est.

[3] Est via quæ videtur homini justa; novissima autem ejus deducunt ad mortem.—Prov xiv. 12.

recollected you always were in the presence of God; how attentive to all your thoughts, words, and actions; how careful in following even the least inspirations of God; how diligent in avoiding every dangerous occasion of sin! you feared even the very name and shadow of sin, and yet most of you acknowledged with holy Job: "I feared all my works,"[1] I was always anxious lest I should have done something displeasing to the divine Majesty. And why? "Knowing that Thou didst not spare the offender;"[2] and that Thou, O most just God, wouldst not allow the least sin to go unpunished. "My ignorances do not remember;"[3] you have often cried out with the penitent David; that is, do not remember the faults and sins I have committed through culpable ignorance and forgetfulness! So anxious were you, although your lives were so holy and perfect! But they who are daily immersed in all kinds of worldly business, who are constantly in dangerous occasions of sin, who hardly think seriously once in the day of God and their souls, who hear nothing good and do little good, who do much evil that is contrary to the obligations of a Christian, and take not the least notice of it; they live in undisturbed repose and tranquillity of conscience! Ah, believe me, "that calm is a tempest!"

The fifth pretext comes from gross ignorance.

Finally, there are people who live in the vices to which they have accustomed themselves from year to year, and never leave the occasions of sin, so that they commit the same sins over and over again. And they are well aware, too, that they are doing wrong, but they do not let that disturb them; they feel no remorse, and most of the time their consciences are at rest. How do they manage that? They depend on their frequent confessions, and imagine that, when they have told their sins candidly, they have done enough and have wiped out all old scores. Thus they continue in their bad habits and in the occasion of sin without any uneasiness, trusting to the confession they intend making during the week, so that they are continually alternating between sin and confession, confession and sin. Now this pretext for quieting one's conscience, so as to enjoy a false peace of mind, is the clumsiest of all, for, as I shall prove more in detail hereafter, the confessions of those people, since they are made without true sorrow and purpose of amendment, are so many new mortal sins, and of course the absolution

[1] Verebar omnia opera mea.—Job ix. 28.
[2] Sciens quod non parceres delinquenti.—Ibid.
[3] Ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.

received in them is null and void. To these people, and to all who make use of the pretexts of which I have spoken, might be addressed the words of St. John to the Bishop of Sardis, "I know thy works, that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead."[1] Alas, unhappy mortals! you flatter yourselves that you are in a good state, and that you have nothing to fear, because you are in the enjoyment of peace of mind; but your consciences are deceived, and your peace is only a false one, "There is a way, which seemeth just to a man; but the ends thereof lead to death."

These people do not wish to be disturbed in their false peace.

But if those people are made to hear the truth, if their consciences are disturbed and their attention called to the falsity of the pretexts on which their peace of mind is founded, they are full of complaints and lamentations. They are like that foolish man in Greece, who imagined that he was always looking at a most entertaining comedy, in which there was everything to delight both ears and eyes; and while his delusion lasted, he was quite happy and contented; but when his friends, pitying the state in which he was, gave him medicine that brought him back to his sound senses, he cried out: Alas, my friends, what have you done? You have taken away my life in restoring me to reason![2] You have deprived me of all pleasure; I wish I were still a fool, that I might enjoy myself as before! It is just the same with those Christians who in any way try to falsify their consciences that they may quiet the pangs of remorse. If they happen to read a spiritual book, or to hear through curiosity a sermon in which their pet vices are spoken of, and the truth is plainly told them; instead of thanking God for the light and knowledge He has sent them, they cry out, full of trouble and anguish; alas, what have I done? Would that I had not touched that wretched book! that I had not remained to hear that sermon! I might still be enjoying my former peace of mind. That book, that sermon has filled me with scruples and anxieties; I must not tamper with such things any more. And, my dear brethren, there are even some who, although they are otherwise very diligent in hearing sermons, if some truth is proposed to them that does not suit their fancies, because it disturbs their consciences and fills them, not with scruples but with a well-founded anxiety, give up going to sermons altogether, and even advise others to do the same, telling them that sermons

[1] Scio opera tua, quia nomen habes quod vivas, et mortuus es.—Apoc. iii. 1.

[2] Me occidistis amici.—Horat. l. 2. Ep. ad Flor.

are not good for anything, except to fill the mind with useless fears. Then they who were not at the sermon are glad they remained away, so as not to be disturbed. How strangely those people act! Suppose that a traveller is on his way to Treves; he loses his way, and meets a peasant who asks him where he is going to. 'To Treves, answers the traveller. Oh, says the other, you are altogether out of your way, my friend! You must turn back and go by that other road, or you will never reach your journey's end. The traveller is very sorry to hear that he has gone astray; but he nevertheless thanks the peasant for his timely warning, and is glad to be put on the right road. But if, instead of that, he were to grumble and say all sorts of hard things of the peasant, because he had shown him his mistake and put him right, would you not look on him as a madman? True, if he were not warned, he would go on contentedly on the wrong way; but where would he come to at last?

They are in a deplorable state of blindness.

O foolish mortals that we are! Woe to us, if we put down as scruples the well-grounded anxieties and warnings of conscience with which God in His mercy enlightens our culpable ignorance, and exhorts us to amend our lives, that He may bring us back on the right road to heaven, from which we have wandered so far astray! Woe to us, if we hate and shun those lights and admonitions, and love and seek our own blindness and darkness! We have reason to pity the wretched state of those sinners who knowingly and wilfully continue in sin year after year, without doing penance, for they are blindly hurrying straight to hell; and in truth, their condition is sad enough to make one shed tears of blood. But after all, do you not think that they who try to lull their consciences to sleep, that they may enjoy a false peace, are in a still more deplorable state? The former know their misery; the latter do not; the former feel the gnawing of remorse; the latter are free from it; and therefore it is much easier for the grace of God to move the former to repent of the sins they know they have committed, than the latter, who do not know their sins, and do not wish to know them.

Conclusion and exhortation to seek true peace of conscience.

Ah Christians, either we are in earnest about going to heaven, or we are not! Do we not wish to go there? Then we can live as we please; but our damnation will be all the deeper hereafter, in proportion to the greater number of sins we commit. Are we determined to gain the eternal joys of heaven? Then, why do we try to hide the truth from ourselves, and to avoid the light? We are false to ourselves, but shall we be able to deceive

the all-knowing God, who sees the heart, and who has already assured us that He will search Jerusalem with a lantern, that is, that He will subject to a most rigorous scrutiny even the holiest works of the just? What better shall we be for having enjoyed a few years of false peace of conscience, as a result of our efforts at self-deception, if at the end of our lives, as will really be the case, our consciences will fling off the cloak of deceit, and show us how guilty we are, and will accuse and condemn us before our impartial Judge? No, my dear brethren, what we wish for, let us wish for it honestly before God and our own consciences. As Our Lord says, "whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light."[1] While we have and can have the light, we must receive it, and believe in it, and love and seek the truth; but if we are in doubt or anxiety we must ask advice from one who will tell us the truth, nor must we think, say, or do anything against the command of God, the Christian law; so that our consciences may truly give us testimony "that we are the sons of God,"[2] and that we may thus enjoy real peace of heart which will be followed by eternal peace in the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court; those things are in peace which he possesseth."

That can with truth be said of the man who is desirous of his eternal salvation, and who carefully tries to keep his conscience free from all sin, and to preserve constantly the friendship of God. "Those things are in peace which he possesseth;" he enjoys a most sweet peace of heart, than which there is nothing more desirable in this life, and he can confidently and with his whole heart rejoice in the Lord. Such, Christians, etc.,—*continues as above.*

On the great advantages of true peace of conscience, see several sermons in the following Fourth Part.

[1] Dum lucem habetis, credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis.—John xii. 36.

[2] Quod sumus filii Dei.—Rom. viii. 16.

EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE IGNORANCE WHICH THE SINNER VOLUNTARILY SEEKS IN ORDER TO FIND PEACE OF CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

In what this ignorance consists, how it is sought, and what an unhappy state is that of those who seek it.—*Preached on Whit-Monday.*

Text.

Lux venit in mundum, et dilexerunt homines magis tenebras quam lucem; erant enim eorum mala opera.—John. iii. 19.

"The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil."

Introduction.

Of the twenty-four hours the sun takes to accomplish its daily journey, the most unpleasant and disagreeable are those of the dark night; for then children are terrified, the healthy wrap themselves up in bed, the sick groan and sigh, wishing that the gloomy night were passed, the wild animals creep into their dens, and all creatures are, as it were, dumb and blind. Yet there are some birds, namely owls and bats, that cannot bear the light of day, and love the dark night, during which they fly about in quest of food. Hence they are hateful to other birds, and are pursued by them during the day. Is it possible, my dear brethren, that amongst reasoning beings there are owls and bats to be found? Yes; for Jesus Christ Himself, the Eternal truth, expressly says so: "The light is come into world, and men loved darkness rather than the light." And why? "For their works were evil;" they are ashamed to let their works see the light of day, and therefore they seek and love the dark night; not, indeed, always our natural night, which could conceal their evil deeds from the eyes of men; but the gloom and darkness of their own souls, that they may conceal their evil deeds from their own consciences, and so live on in sin undisturbed. St. Thomas of Aquin distinguishes three kinds of spiritual darkness and blindness which men are fond of: the first is a wilfully sought blindness, which is in itself an inexcusable sin; the second is a culpable blindness, which is the occasion of many sins, and is there-

fore also inexcusable; the third is a blindness into which God sometimes allows man to fall, and it is the greatest punishment of sin. To-day I shall explain the first of these, namely, that wilfully sought blindness or ignorance which is in itself a sin.

Plan of Discourse.

In what this blindness consists, how it is sought, and what an unhappy state is that of those who seek it. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction.

Come, O Holy Ghost, enlighten our hearts and inflame our wills, that we may always seek Thy brilliant light, receive it with eagerness, and live according to it. This we beg of Thee through the merits of Thy virginal Spouse Mary, and of our holy guardian angels.

In what wilfully sought blindness consists.

By the first kind of wilfully sought blindness, which is in itself sinful, the Angelic Doctor understands nothing else than a wilful ignorance of divine things, or a deliberate negligence on the part of him who does not wish or fears to be instructed in many things that concern faith, the divine law, his state and condition in life, his conscience, and his eternal salvation, lest the knowledge of the truth should convince him that he is bound to do more good, or to avoid more evil, than he is generally accustomed or now intends to do or to avoid. A man of this kind is one of those wicked people of whom holy Job complains that "they spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell. Who have said to God: depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."[1] We do not wish to have an exact knowledge of Thy commandments; the gloom in which we have hitherto lived is light enough for us; even if we are inexperienced in many things, and are often ignorant of the duties of our state of life, yet we are at peace, and can act according to our good will and pleasure. We are not subject to the anxieties that harass those scrupulous souls who are always trying to discern good from evil, and who make a sin and a hell in their own fancies of every little amusement they indulge in. The Prophet David says of such people: "He would not understand that he might do well,"[2] that is, they do not wish to learn what is good, lest they should have to do it. Nay, as St. Jerome says, "They rejoice in self-deception, and look on it as a ben-

[1] Ducunt in bonis dies suos, et in puncto ad inferna descendunt. Qui dixerunt Deo: Recede a nobis, et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 13, 14.

[2] Noluit intelligere ut bene ageret.—Ps. xxxv. 4.

efit to delude themselves,"[1] because they are thus more at ease and do not so often feel the sting of conscience.

There are many who love that ignorance.

But, my dear brethren, is it necessary for me to speak of such people in a Catholic city? Is it possible for a man to sink to such depths of blindness and depravity, as to wish to shun the light, lest he should see the truth, and to have no desire to learn how to distinguish good from evil, that he may be more free to do evil? Alas, there are only too many cases of the kind in these days of ours! Nor do I allude now to wilful heretics, who at once close their eyes to the light, and avoid the trouble of making further inquiries, after they have received the light of grace to see the evident truth of our holy faith, and to have well-grounded doubts at least, regarding the palpable errors of the sect to which they belong; and they act thus, lest the knowledge of the truth should force them to embrace another faith and to change their mode of life; a change that human respect, an inordinate love of temporal things, a desire of their own ease and comfort, and a fear of difficulties have hitherto prevented them from making.

Even amongst Catholics.

Even amongst Christians (who could believe it?), amongst Catholics, there are owls and bats who shun the light, seek the darkness, and love their own ignorance and blindness. And these are half-hearted Catholics, who have barely the name of Christians, who deliberately continue in sin from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, without confession or repentance; or, if they do go to confession, it is only for the sake of appearance; for they never really open their hearts, nor disclose the maladies of their souls; or else they seek a confessor who, as they think, has no experience, or who lacks courage and zeal enough to reprove their vices and remind them of their obligations. And why do they act thus? Our Lord gives the reason in to-day's Gospel: "For their works were evil," and they wish to continue in them undisturbed. They are afraid of being warned of their duties, lest they should be obliged in future to mortify their inordinate appetites, to restore ill-gotten gains, to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, to renounce unlawful customs, or to give up the company of that person with whom they have hitherto lived in unlawful intercourse. It does not at all suit them to do any of these things, and therefore they do not wish to see the truth, or to be taught it, or warned of it by others.

[1] Gaudent ad circumventionem suam, et illusionem pro beneficio ponunt.

They are those who, although conscience and right reason now and then inspire them with grave doubts as to whether a certain thing is lawful or not, yet pay no heed to those doubts and dismiss from their minds all anxious thoughts and divine inspirations, lest they might find out that what they wish and intend to do is not right. And this they do over and over again, until they have stifled the cries of conscience and made themselves insensible to its gnawings. They are those who, for the same reasons, refuse to listen to good advice, and select as their counsellors people without candor, experience, or conscience, who are addicted to the same vices, and are of the same opinions as themselves. They are afraid to go to a sermon, for fear they should hear the truth, or have their consciences disturbed, or be reminded of the duties of their state. There is a certain nation, says Ambrosinos, called Phanesians, whose ears are so long and broad that they can lie down on one as on a bed, and cover themselves with the other as with a quilt; thus, wherever they are, they can rest comfortably during the night. I do not dare to assert that this is a true story, although it is related by different authors, but I am quite sure that, to enjoy real peace of conscience, we must have good ears to hear the word of God, in order to be instructed in the duties and obligations of our state of life. But those people make a different use of their ears to secure peace of conscience; they close them tightly, so as not to hear any good advice that might disturb them in their evil ways. Hence the only effect the truth has on them is to excite them to anger and hatred, so that even the pulpit itself arouses their enmity.

Who do not ask when in doubt, nor wish to hear good advice or sermons.

If they happen to hear a sermon that touches on their secret vices, they act like the governor Felix, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles. This Felix was a great sinner; he was living in adultery with Drusilla, whom he had taken away from her lawful husband; he was an unjust judge, who condemned the innocent, and absolved the guilty, because he allowed himself to be influenced by bribes; he employed assassins, revenged himself in secret, shed innocent blood, and was afraid of no man. St. Paul, laden with chains, was brought before him to be tried, and knowing well the kind of man he had to deal with, he said nothing in his own defence, but with a holy freedom spoke to him of his duty as a judge, of the necessity of observing chastity, and of the severity of the judgment of God that was to come. Felix, conscious of the impurity and injus-

Who pay no regard to what they hear.

tice of which he was guilty, began to tremble with fear; but instead of listening further to what the Apostle had to say to move him to repent and amend his wicked life, he stopped him short and told him to go away. "And as he treated of justice, and chastity, and of the judgment to come, Felix, being terrified, answered: For this time go thy way."[1] Such is the way in which those half-hearted Christians act. If you warn them of the dangerous state of their souls, they grow tired of listening at once, and if they cannot leave the church while the sermon is going on they endeavor to turn away their thoughts, so that what is said may make no impression on them. If they happen to take up a book that treats of the four Last Things, they throw it down at once, saying that it is no book for them because it makes them uneasy. They are very willing to take part in processions, to say the Rosary, or to be present at benediction, so long as they are not likely to hear the word of God; because they must practise some Christian devotion or other, and devotions of this kind are least likely to interfere with the false peace of their sinful hearts.

And hate all preachers, that they may go on undisturbed in their wickedness.

If any one at home speaks to them about what the preacher said, and how he inveighed against a certain vice, or described the torments of hell, or the difficulty of entering on the narrow way that leads to heaven, etc., O, let him preach away, they will say; that preacher has no control over himself; he does not know how to speak to people, nor to make the necessary distinction between respectable people and the common herd, whose way of life differs so much, etc. O what blindness! as if there were one law, one gospel for the rich, and another for the poor! as if there were one way to heaven for the great, and another for the lowly! as if God were so influenced by human respect that He wishes to be less feared, honored, loved, and served by the former, than by the latter! But they will find out all about that by and by! Meanwhile, however, they do not wish to be told the truth, and therefore they hate and despise preachers, or else they go to hear only those who, as they know by experience, will not disturb them nor interfere with their false peace of mind. They are, as the Prophet Isaias says: "Lying children, children that will not hear the law of God; who say to the seers: See not; and to them that behold, Behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us

[1] Disputante autem illo de justitia et castitate, et de judicio futuro, tremefactus Felix respondit: quod nunc attinet, vade.—Acts xxiv. 25.

pleasant things, see errors for us;"[1] you can preach lies and falsehood to us, that we may continue our present mode of life undisturbed. And thus they do whatever is pleasing to their own comfort or sensuality, and they sin boldly without that anxiety of conscience they would feel if they were desirous of knowing the truth, and if they were diligent in hearing the word of God in sermons.

Shown by a simile.

When a man is going to lay down to sleep, he first closes all the doors and windows of his room, blows out the light, and then covers himself up in bed. There is nothing more annoying to one who wishes to enjoy a sound sleep, than for some one to come in and shake him about, and hold a light before his eyes; oh, oh, he will say, turning away his face, take away that light! I want to go to sleep! There may be loud talking or laughing going on in the room, but it does not trouble him much; how is it then that the light has such power to annoy him? Because there is nothing that hinders sleep so much as to have a brilliant light shining in one's eyes. And that is just the reason why a Christian who loves the darkness hates and flies the word of God, and cannot bear exhortation or instruction. He lies buried in the deep sleep of sin; he finds therein a false repose and the pleasures of sensuality, nor does he wish to be awakened or aroused. The light of truth, the word of God, is that which is most hostile to this sleep; it shines too strongly in his eyes; it calls out into his ears: "Rise, thou that sleepest!"[2] and therefore he cannot bear it. Away with the light! he says in thought; away with preaching and exhorting! I do not want it!

Therefore the proud, the avaricious, and the unchaste cannot bear the light.

And how could the proud man bear to have Christian humility and modesty constantly preached to him in those words of Our Lord: "Amen, I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;"[3] "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."[4] Oh, a light of that kind is far too strong for his eyes! It would disturb him too much, and so, away with it! How could a vain worldling, who lives according to the luxurious usages and maxims of the world, listen patiently to the exhorta-

[1] Filii mendaces, filii nolentes audire legem Dei, qui dicunt videntibus; nolite videre; et aspicientibus: nolite aspicere nobis ea quæ recta sunt; loquimini nobis placentia, videte nobis errores.—Is. xxx. 9, 10.

[2] Surge, qui dormis.—Ephes. v. 14.

[3] Amen dico vobis, nisi conversi fueritis et efficiamini sicut parvuli non intrabitis in regnum cœlorum.—Matt. xviii. 3.

[4] Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—James iv. 6.

tion: "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world;"[1] for he that loves the world is an enemy of God? No, that light is too troublesome; away with it! How could the unjust and avaricious man bear to be told that he must make restitution of his ill-gotten gains, or else he will lose heaven; that he must "make to himself friends of the mammon of iniquity, by being generous to the poor and needy, so that, when he shall fail, they may receive him into everlasting dwellings."[2] "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee; and where shall those things be which thou hast provided?"[3] Oh, that light shines too strong in his eyes! Take it away at once! How could the impure man, who indulges his carnal appetites, bear to hear any one constantly repeating to him, in the words of St. John the Baptist to king Herod: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife;"[4] it is not lawful for you to remain any longer in that house, in the company of that person; it is not lawful for you to go to that house, that person; even an unchaste look, or sign, or a libidinous kiss given or permitted, or an impure thought deliberately entertained, is a mortal sin? Away at once with such an annoying light; there is no possibility of resting as long as it is glaring in one's eyes!

Nor the vindictive, the intemperate, or the slothful.

How can the vindictive man, whose whole thought is revenge, listen calmly to the express command of Our Lord, "I say to you: "Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you."?[5] "So also shall my heavenly Father do to you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."[6] Unless you forgive your brother, and that too from your heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your sins? That light is too strong for his eyes; it must be put out or taken away at once. How can the intemperate man, who drinks to excess, and thereby gives occasion to many sins, understand the threat of the holy Apostle, St. Paul, "Nor drunkards shall possess the kingdom of God;"[7] or the

[1] Nolite diligere mundum, neque ea quæ in mundo sunt.—I. John ii. 15.

[2] Facite vobis amicos de mammona iniquitatis, ut cum defeceritis, recipiant vos in æterna tabernacula.—Luke xvi. 9.

[3] Stulte, hac nocte animam tuam repetent a te; quæ autem parasti, cujus erunt?—Luke xii. 20.

[4] Non licet tibi habere uxorem fratris tui.—Mark vi. 18.

[5] Ego autem dico vobis, diligite inimicos vestros; benefacite his qui oderunt vos; et orate pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos.—Matt. v. 44.

[6] Sic et Pater meus cœlestis faciet vobis, si non remiseritis unusquisque fratri suo de cordibus vestris.—Matt. xviii. 35.

[7] Neque ebriosi regnum dei possidebunt.—I. Cor. vi. 10.

exhortation of St. Peter, "Be sober and watch."[1] No, a light of that kind interferes too much with his sleep! How can the man who is slothful and lazy in the service of God, or who devotes all his thoughts and cares to temporal concerns, or whose whole idea is to lead an idle, easy, comfortable life, how can he find any meaning in the words of Christ, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away."[2] Broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter thereon; narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there are who find it; strive then, do violence to yourselves, that you may enter by the narrow gate. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."[3] Alas, that troublesome light is too painful for eyes and ears! Away with it! they all say; we do not want it, we do not wish to know anything about it, that we may sleep on undisturbed in our ignorance. To all these people one might say what a certain English nobleman once said to a heretical princess; he was pushing her rather hard in an argument on some matter of faith, and she said to him, O, let us change the conversation, and talk of something more agreeable; I do not want to be troubled by scruples or anxieties of conscience. Madam, answered the nobleman, you prefer to remain in the most dangerous ignorance, rather than feel any anxiety of conscience; very well, then! continue in that ignorance, and you will be lost forever without anxiety of conscience! And this, says St. John Climacus, is a real trick of the devil, who, like a thief that does not attempt to steal until all the lights are out and every one in the house is asleep, takes away the light from men, and deprives them of sound teaching and of good inspirations and exhortations, that he may all the more securely steal away their souls, keep them in the sleep of sin into which they have sunk, and at last drag them down to the eternal darkness of hell, out of the darkness that they have wilfully loved and sought for during life.

How these people try to calm their consciences.

But, we might well ask, how is it possible for those Christians to live in peace and undisturbed when they are leading vicious lives? Their own consciences must necessarily disquiet them, and exhort them to amend their ways. Quite true, my dear brethren; but do you know how they manage matters with their

[1] Sobrii estote et vigilate.—I. Pet. v. 8.

[2] Regnum cœlorum vim patitur, et violenti rapiunt illud.—Matt. xi. 12.

[3] Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me?—Matt. xvi. 24.

consciences? They act as a man who, being seated at table and wishing to finish his meal quietly, acts towards his dog. The hungry animal, seeing the food brought in, does his best to let his master see that he is hungry; he barks and jumps from one side to the other, and gives no rest until he has attracted attention. At last his master throws him a bare bone. And will that satisfy him? will he be contented to gnaw at it, although there is not a bit of meat on it? this is not much, to appease his hunger on a bare bone; yet it is enough to quiet the dog; he gnaws away, and neither barks nor leaps about any more, so that his master can finish his meal in peace. In the same way do those wilfully blind people act. There is no doubt that their bad consciences, like barking and leaping dogs, often trouble them; but they throw a bone to the dog to keep him quiet. And what is that? Their own wilful ignorance. I am not guilty of sin, they say to themselves, unless I know beforehand that what I am doing is unlawful: but I know and wish to know nothing about it; I am not certain that this or that is forbidden, nor do I mean to take the trouble of finding out; therefore I can do it without committing sin. But what a futile, worthless, and empty excuse that is! The fact that you have wilfully avoided the light will not help you in the least at the judgment-seat of God! No matter; the bone is thrown to the dog to keep him quiet; the empty excuse keeps the conscience silent for a time at least.

They are in a very unhappy state.

Alas, says St Bernard, how miserable and unhappy the state of those people! For the soul is never in a worse or more desperate condition, than when the sinner is without remorse of conscience. "There is a conscience that is bad, and at the same time peaceful; and as there is nothing worse than it, so also there is nothing more miserable."[1] If you feel no remorse, then there is no check on your sins, nothing to move you to repentance and amendment; "that is, the conscience which has no fear of God, no regard for man, and which, once it has sunk into the depth of sin, becomes utterly callous."[2] And how, in God's name, can one do any good for sinners of that kind? A blind man, who knows and acknowledges that he is blind, bewails and deplores his affliction; he would willingly give all he

[1] Est conscientia mala et tranquilla, qua sicut nihil est pejus, ita nihil est infelicius.—St Bern. l. de conscientia.

[2] Hæc illa est, quæ nec Deum timet, nec hominem reveretur; quæ, cum venerit in profundum malorum, contemnit.

has if he could thereby be enabled once more to see the light of day; he walks about cautiously, groping with his hands and feeling his way, lest he should stumble against something and hurt himself; he allows himself to be led about by others, that he may not fall into a ditch and break his neck or his limbs. But those sinners are blind and ignorant, and they rejoice in their blindness and ignorance, because they can fall into the ditch without being aware of it; every hour of the day they get a severe fall, and they do not feel it; they inflict mortal wounds on their souls, but they do not wince under them; they are in imminent danger of eternal death, and they know it not. They are well aware that they are blind, but they will not allow any one to lead them. We read in the Fourth Book of Kings that, at the prayers of the Prophet Eliseus, the soldiers of the king of Syria were struck blind, so that they did not know where they were going to. "Strike, I beseech Thee," said the Prophet to the Lord, "this people with blindness. And the Lord struck them with blindness, according to the words of Eliseus."[1] Blinded as they were, they suffered themselves to be led about by the Prophet, until he brought them into Samaria, into the midst of the Israelites, their enemies; then Eliseus cried out to God: "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw themselves to be in the midst of Samaria,"[2] surrounded by their enemies. There you have a true picture of the unhappy condition of those wilfully blind people. Where do they not allow the devil and their own evil inclinations to lead them? And what a dangerous road they are on! For they are going straight to hell, where their enemies are awaiting them. And yet they are perfectly at ease; they know not and care not to know anything of their danger, for they have blinded themselves, and they love their blindness; but at the hour of death their eyes will be opened, and they will find themselves in hell, in the midst of their enemies. According to a certain author this is the mystic meaning of the event recorded in the Book of Kings. "Thus," he says, "sinners who are now blind to heavenly things will find at the end of their lives that they are surrounded by the enemies of their souls· but the eye of their mind will be opened

[1] Percute, obsecro, gentem hanc cæcitate. Percussitque eos Dominus, ne viderent, juxta verbum Elisei.—IV. Kings vi. 18.

[2] Domine aperi oculos istorum ut videant. Aperuitque Dominus oculos eorum, et viderunt se esse in medio Samariæ.—Ibid. 20.

too late."[1] Alas for those unhappy people! Would that a prophet were to arise, before it goes too far with them, to restore them their sight, that they may see what they do not wish to see now; that they may know they are already in Samaria, that is, in the hands of their most cruel enemies, the devils, fettered every day with still heavier chains, and being led on the way to hell! "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see!"

And there is no way of helping them.

But what am I saying? Why do I wish that a prophet should arise for them? There are prophets enough who are willing to enlighten them, but they do not wish to be enlightened, and they avoid the prophets. How then are they to be brought back to God, and to be moved to repentance and amendment? I know not; there is no means of moving them. Other and even great sinners are often led to repent by reading a spiritual book, or the lives of the saints; but they never think of taking up a book of that kind, lest their consciences should be disturbed. Other sinners are often converted by a conversation on heavenly things, or by hearing a sermon; they never go to a sermon, and they hate all salutary exhortations that might alarm or make them uneasy. The first step on the way to eternal salvation is to seek this way and to desire earnestly to find it; but they do not want to know anything about it, and how can they enter on it? The blind man of Jericho, as St John Chrysostom says, would never have recovered his sight if he had not desired and longed for it; when he was told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he cried out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."[2] "What wilt thou that I do to thee?"[3] asked Our Lord. "But he said: Lord that I may see."[4] But these other blind people, what do they ask for? Instead of saying, Lord, that I may see; enlighten my understanding; have pity on me, that I may know my misery; they cry out in the desires of their hearts, Lord, that I may *not* see! I do not want the light; let me not know my faults and sins; keep from me the knowledge of the miserable and dangerous state of my soul, that I may not be overwhelmed by fear, anguish, and sadness!

Not even in their death beds.

Deplorable indeed is your condition! But, if you do not wish to change, go on in your blindness and ignorance! The time

[1] Sic peccatores ad cœlestia cæci in extremo vitæ suæ ab hostibus undique conclusi serius mentis suæ oculos aperient.

[2] Jesu, fili David, miserere mei.—Luke xviii. 38.

[3] Quid tibi vis faciam?—Ibid. 41.

[4] At ille dixit: Domine, ut videam. —Ibid.

will come when you will seek the light, and will not find it, and after you are gone, people will pray, and sing, and sigh for you, "Eternal rest give to them, O Lord;" but in vain; for as you have rejected the light here, you must lie forever hereafter in exterior darkness. Nor will your eyes be opened until you are in Samaria, in hell, and there you will know what a mistake you have made, and will see that you are in perpetual imprisonment. "He that hateth reproof shall die,"[1] says the Wise Man; eternal death is already prepared for him. Hear the fate that Job foretells for those who say to God: "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."[2] What will happen to them? "They shall be as chaff before the face of the wind, and as ashes which the whirlwind scattereth."[3] His eyes shall see his own destruction, and he shall drink of the wrath of the Almighty."[4] But when? Will they see their mistake in their last moments, when death is staring them in the face? Not by any means, unless God works a miracle, which they have little reason to hope for, who persistently rejected the light during life. They will die in the same blindness and ignorance in which they lived. Hear their last despairing sighs, as they are described by the Holy Ghost in the Book of Wisdom: "Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us; we wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, but the way of the Lord we have not known,"[5] because we did not wish to know it. Now we know that our former ignorance will not help us before the judgment-seat of God; we are betrayed, because we have wilfully betrayed ourselves. "We have been able to show no mark of virtue; but are consumed in our wickedness."[6] And when and where will they lament in those terms? On their death-bed? No; "Such things as these the sinners said in hell."[7]

Conclusion and exhortation to

O God of goodness! save us all from this terrible blindness! Christians, I hope this sermon is not for any of you, inasmuch

[1] Qui increpationes odit, morietur.—Prov. xv. 10.

[2] Recede a nobis et scientiam viarum tuarum nolumus.—Job xxi. 14.

[3] Erunt sicut paleæ ante faciem venti, et sicut favilla quam turbo dispergit.—Ibid. 18.

[4] Videbunt oculi ejus interfectionem suam, et de furore Omnipotentis bibet.—Ibid. 20.

[5] Ergo erravimus a via veritatis, et justitiæ lumen non luxit nobis, et sol intelligentiæ non est ortus nobis. Lassati sumus in via iniquitatis et perditionis, ... viam autem Domini ignoravimus.—Wisd. v. 6, 7.

[6] Virtutis quidem nullum signum valuimus ostendere; in malignitate autem nostra consumpti sumus.—Ibid. 13.

[7] Talia dixerunt in inferno hi, qui peccaverunt.—Ibid. 14.

seek and accept the divine light.

as you, by hearing the word of God, are zealously seeking the light and the knowledge of the way that leads to heaven! Therefore, for your advantage, I conclude, in the words of Christ in the Gospel of St. John, "Whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be the children of the light.[1] Go on as you are going, and be guided in all your actions by no other rule but the eternal truths; be not misled by evil inclinations and carnal desires, nor by the false maxims of the vain world, "that the darkness overtake you not;"[2] that you may not lose the light and be plunged into horrible gloom. Thou, O God of light, art the way, the truth, and the life; give to and preserve in us all a heart obedient to and desirous of hearing salutary instructions and exhortations; enlighten by Thy word the darkness of our understanding; impel our sluggish wills, that we may always know what is pleasing to Thy holy will, and fulfil it with all our strength, whilst we avoid above every other imaginable evil what we know to be displeasing to Thee. And grant that we may thus walk constantly in Thy shining light on the way to heaven, without ever straying from the right path, until, when the dangers of this life shall have passed, we enjoy, with Thy chosen friends, the eternal light of Thy glory. Amen.

NINTH SERMON.

ON CULPABLE IGNORANCE, AS A CAUSE OF MANY SINS.

Subject.

What culpable ignorance is; how common it is, and how inexcusable before God.—*Preached on the Tuesday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Illi autem non cognoverunt quid loqueretur eis.—John x. 6.
"But they understood not what He spoke to them."

Introduction.

It is not surprising that the Scribes and Pharisees did not understand what Our Lord meant by the similes He made use of. For they were blind to heavenly things, as Christ Himself said on

[1] Dum lucem habetis credite in lucem, ut filii lucis sitis.—John xii. 36.
[2] Ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—Ibid. 35.

another occasion, "Let them alone; they are blind, and leaders of the blind."[1] Their vices had blinded them, and they were hardened in wickedness. But what does surprise me, my dear brethren, is this, that there are amongst Catholics, amongst the members of the one true Church who are illumined by the light of the Holy Ghost, and are not yet so hardened as the Pharisees formerly were, some who are so blind, so ignorant in many things that concern the law of God and their own salvation, that they do not understand what God and His servants say to them. But the fact is, they do not wish to understand; they are blind and ignorant, because they deliberately seek and love blindness and ignorance, that they may continue to lead sinful lives without being troubled by remorse. Yesterday I bewailed the unhappy state of those people. To-day I shall describe the second kind of spiritual blindness, namely culpable ignorance, which is the cause of many sins.

Plan of Discourse.

What this culpable ignorance is, how common it is amongst men, and how inexcusable it is before God. Such is the subject of the present instruction.

That we may avoid this ignorance, and keep Thy law in truth, give us, O Holy Ghost, Thy light and Thy grace, without which we can do nothing; this we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

In what inculpable ignorance consists.

The ignorance of which we speak consists in this, that one would often refrain from doing, thinking, or saying certain things, if he were aware of certain circumstances connected with them; if he knew that those thoughts, words, or actions were unlawful and offensive to God, or else that he would not omit certain things if he knew for certain that he was in duty bound to do them under pain of sin; all which circumstances, however, he could and should know. And what is the meaning of that? He could and should know? Now pray be attentive to what I am going to say. It happens, for instance, that a fast-day or a holyday occurs during the week, but there is one individual who never thinks of it, and he eats meat on the fast-day, or else he does not hear Mass on the holyday, and it is only afterwards that he learns what kind of a day it is. The question is, has that man committed sin by eating meat, or by

[1] Sinite illos; cæci sunt, et duces cæcorum.—Matt. xv. 14.

not hearing Mass? No, I answer, because he knew nothing about it. But you say, he could have known about it? Quite true, absolutely speaking; he could have known about it, if somebody had given him warning beforehand, or if he had a reasonable doubt and suspicion concerning the matter. But, since there was neither warning nor doubt in the case, he could not and was not bound to know anything further, so that his ignorance was inculpable, and it frees him from all sin in the sight of God.

In what culpable ignorance consists.

On the other hand, there is another man who is about to do or to say something concerning which he has a reasonable doubt as to whether it is lawful or not, but in spite of the doubt, and without taking any trouble to settle it, he carries out his intention; or else he knows that he is not sufficiently instructed in religious matters that concern the duties of his state of life, and yet, through sheer laziness and indifference, he seldom goes to a sermon, or tries to get proper instruction; now this man commits many and grievous breaches of duty; does he sin by so doing? There is not the least doubt of it. But why? he does not know that he is guilty of sin. True; he could and should have known it under such circumstances; for when doubts of the lawfulness of his act occurred to him, it was his duty, before acting, to inquire and set his doubts at rest; and if he had done so, he would have found out that the action was sinful. Further, knowing himself to be ignorant of many things, it was his duty to attend sermons or other instructions, that he might learn what he had to do. But he neglected both of these duties, and therefore his ignorance is culpable, or, as theologians say, vincible, and it cannot excuse the faults and sins of which it is the occasion.

Through ignorance of this kind Saul persecuted David.

We have in King Saul an example of this ignorance. See how he tried to excuse himself for the rage and fury with which he persecuted David. "It appeareth," he said, "that I have done foolishly, and have been ignorant in very many things."[1] Mark how he puts forward his ignorance as an excuse. And yet, did he not know very well that David was most innocent in his regard, and never had the least intention of depriving him of life and usurping his crown? Did he not know that he himself was guilty of the greatest cruelty in persecuting and trying to kill an innocent man? There is no doubt that he was fully aware of it, but he was blinded by jealousy, and paid no attention to the fact

[1] Apparet quod stulte egerim, et ignoraverim multa nimis.—I. Kings xxvi. 21.

that he was persecuting David without cause; or rather, he knew well enough that such was the case, but he did not wish to know it. If his ignorance had been justifiable, he would have changed his persecution into love, after having found out the truth; but he did not do so, and therefore his ignorance was culpable and blameworthy.

And the Jews crucified Our Lord.

We have a still clearer example of it in the high-priests and elders of the Jewish people who put to death Jesus Christ, the Son of God. To take God prisoner and treat Him as a malefactor, to scorn Him as a fool and a mock-king, to scourge and flog Him, and condemn Him to death like a public criminal, and to nail Him to a disgraceful gibbet, that was certainly a sin the bare thought of which is enough to make one's hair stand on end with horror; and yet it was a sin that had its origin in culpable ignorance. The Scribes and Pharisees and high-priests were certainly determined to persecute Christ and put Him to death; but they were not quite certain that He was the Son of God, or they would not have crucified Him, as St. Paul testifies: "For, if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory."[1] Truly, says St. Peter to the Jews, "the author of life you killed. . . And now, brethren, I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers."[2] You have oppressed the just man, and have demanded a robber to be given to you in His stead, but it was all done through ignorance, because you knew not that He was the Son of God. Jesus Christ Himself, when praying for His murderers on the cross, said, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."[3] Nevertheless, who will excuse the Jews and high-priests from a most fearful sin? For they could and should have known who Christ was. They were well aware that He had performed many miracles, that He had made the blind to see and the lame to walk, that He had cleansed lepers and raised the dead to life; and that was certainly proof enough that He was something more than a mere mortal; but they put the thought out of their minds at once, and, full of envy and hatred, they vented their rage on Him. Their ignorance, therefore, was gross and culpable, and altogether inexcusable.

This culpable ignorance is common nowadays in matters

My dear brethren, there is nothing more common among Christians nowadays, than this culpable ignorance, which every

[1] Si enim cognovissent, nunquam Dominum gloriæ crucifixissent.—I. Cor. ii. 8.

[2] Auctorem vitæ interfecistis. . . Et nunc, fratres, scio quia per ignorantiam fecistis, sicut et principes vestri.—Acts iii. 15, 17.

[3] Pater dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.

relating to superstition and injustice.

day occasions numbers of sins that are not considered sins. How many acts of superstition and devil-worship are not committed amongst the common people, for the purpose of curing illnesses, or healing cattle, or finding lost or stolen things, or to avert a misfortune, or to arrest a fugitive, etc.? And to this end they put their confidence in means or things that have been invented by fortune-tellers, or seen in dreams, and that have no power or efficacy to produce such effects, either of themselves, or from God, or from the Church. Simple-minded people are guilty of this folly, because they do not know what the law of God condemns or approves of in such matters; and as long as the desired effect is produced, they consider the means lawful, although a well-founded suspicion of its lawfulness may often occur to them. How many grievous sins, too, of injustice are committed in the same way? For very often things are stolen by the poor from the rich, by servants from their masters, by workmen from their employers, and by shop-keepers from their customers; and although the thefts are small, yet in the course of time they amount to something considerable. And the people who are guilty of those thefts excuse themselves in their ignorance, by saying: Oh, it is only a small matter; it is at the farthest a venial sin; it is surely no great harm to take a trifle from a rich man who has abundance. How many acts of injustice are also committed in different offices and employments by those who are well aware that they do not understand their business sufficiently, and yet continue in their office, although through ignorance and incapacity they are the occasion of harm to many! For as a general rule they persuade themselves that they can follow the custom observed by others, and if a doubt occurs to them, they appeal at once to the example of those who held the same office before them. They were sensible and honest people, they say, and they led edifying lives; there are others too, in the same position as myself, who imitate them; all these people wish to save their souls and escape hell; why should I not do as they do in this matter? etc. How many injustices are committed by defrauding workmen and laborers of their just wages, either wholly or partially? by keeping shopkeepers for years out of the money due them for goods bought from them? by not paying one's lawful debts, when possible? by borrowing money that there is no prospect of paying, and at the same time going to unnecessary expense in furniture, clothing, and costly living? And all these sins are committed by people who im-

agine that, as long as they have the good intention of paying some time or other, there is no danger of their committing sin, and hence they never think of mentioning such things in confession.

By lying, not training one's children properly, and vindictiveness.

How many sins of lying and falsehood are committed amongst married people and servants, because, through ignorance, they think that it is lawful for them to lie to avoid discord and strife, and to preserve peace and harmony, as long as the lies do no harm to any one? In what an evil and un-Christian manner children are sometimes brought up in idleness and worldly vanity from their very youth, while they learn but little of the Christian doctrine, and, under pretence of relationship, or future marriage, or of learning how to behave in society, they are allowed all freedom with the opposite sex, both in public and private? This too comes from the culpable ignorance and deplorable negligence of parents, who do not think of, or acknowledge that most important obligation that God has imposed on them, of bringing up their children to work for the attainment of their last end, to love and fear God, and to gain heaven. And if any one reminds them of their duty, or if they feel the sting of remorse, they think and say: Oh, there is no harm done; the poor children must have some amusement; they must learn how to behave in society, etc. Meanwhile their innocent souls are stained with many sins, they grow up in the practice of secret vices, and the result often is that they go with their parents to the eternal flames of hell. How often and in how many ways that command of Our Lord, "but I say to you, love your enemies," is grievously transgressed by those who secretly nourish hatred and resentment against their neighbor for years and years, and who cannot bear to see him, or to say a friendly word to him, so that they refuse to give him the ordinary salutations, and, through a spirit of revenge, deny him the usual courtesies! And this they do without the least scruple, thinking that it is enough for them merely to say, I bear him no ill-will; I do not wish him any harm; I forgive him from my heart, etc; and that they are not bound to anything further.

By slander, scandal-giving, and bad confessions.

In how many ways, and how grievously is not Christian charity violated by rash judgments, fault-finding, and making ill-natured remarks about the actions of others, while they who sin in this way imagine that there cannot be much harm in it, since the faults they speak of are known to many, or because they speak of them only in confidence, and under a pledge of

secrecy, or because they must contribute their share to the general conversation.

How many sins one occasions others to commit by caresses, impure gestures, and other actions which are the cause of scandal, although they are hardly thought anything of by those that are guilty of them, because they say to themselves: I have no bad meaning in what I am doing, nor do I intend to lead others into sin! How many sins of others do not people become responsible for by neglecting the duty of fraternal correction, when they could and ought to save their neighbor from sin, and from the danger of it, by giving him a salutary warning or exhortation! But they say to themselves: what is it to me? I have to look after myself, etc. How many unworthy Communions and sacrilegious confessions are not made by those who do not rightly know what is required for a proper examination of conscience, and especially for true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment! For there are people who continue in the same habit of sin from one confession to another, in the same improper familiarity, in the same dangerous occasion, and they imagine all the time that it is enough for them merely to declare their sin in confession.

By impurity and worldliness.

How many grievous sins are not committed against purity by persons of both sexes! What impure thoughts and desires constantly pass through their imaginations! How many indecent words and songs they give utterance to! What disgusting pictures and statues are to be seen in their houses! What dangerous romances and love-tales are sometimes read, even before young people! How many love-letters are interchanged! How many impure looks are indulged in, even in the house of God! What freedom there is in jesting, laughing, recreation, and what dangerous liberties are allowed in mixed company! All these things are forbidden and condemned by our faith, and yet they are indulged in sometimes without scruple or anxiety, because there are people who, through gross ignorance, look on them as not sinful. Their idea is that, as long as one abstains from outward actions, there is no harm in indulging in mere thoughts and desires, which one has no intention of carrying into effect. Oh! if they only knew that everything that is done, said, or thought deliberately against holy purity, is sinful, and, generally speaking, mortally sinful, it would not be possible for Catholics who think of saving their souls to be so careless in this particular. What a vain, idle, unmortified and sensual life, utterly opposed to the Christian law and the spirit of the

Gospel, people sometimes lead! And yet they never think of saying anything about it in confession, much less of amending it, and that, too, through culpable ignorance, because they refuse to see any harm in such a mode of life, and it is one that chimes in with the ideas of the world. Meanwhile, if they are warned in a sermon, or in the confessional, and told that they are frequently guilty of mortal sin, alas, they cry out in an agony of remorse, would that I had known that before, and I would have led a different life! God forbid that I should make a compact with the devil by superstitious practices! God forbid that I should lose my soul by committing several small thefts! God forbid that I should be the cause of the eternal ruin of my neighbor, or of my own dear children! God forbid that I should make sacrilegious confessions and Communions! With the help of God I am free from those sins, for I knew nothing about them! You knew nothing about them? But you should have known about them, and therefore, through your culpable ignorance, you have often and grievously trangressed the divine law.

Such ignorance does not excuse the sins committed through it.

Now you have the answer to the question as to whether ignorance of that kind is likely to excuse us, before the judgment-seat of God, for the sins that are committed through it; and whether it will be of any advantage to us to say, by way of justification, Lord, I have, it is true, transgressed Thy commands, and violated the Christian law; but I did not know that I was guilty of a grievous sin thereby, or I would never have done it. Would to God, my dear brethren, that such were the case, that countless sins were not offensive to God, and that we could strike out of the catalogue of crime thousands of actions, and be thus released from the enormous debt of complete satisfaction and from the necessity of doing penance; for, God help us, there are mortal sins enough already committed with full knowledge and deliberation. But if I wish to speak the truth in the matter, I must tell you plainly, Christians, that these excuses are of no avail. I will let St. Bernard answer the question for me: Alas, he says, if such were the case, if ignorance of the kind excused us in the sight of God, why did the same God, in the Old Law, when men were not so enlightened in spiritual things as we are now, command His people to offer certain sacrifices for the sins committed through ignorance alone? These are the words of the law, that the Lord gave His people by the Prophet Moses: "And if through ignorance you omit any of these things, which the Lord hath spoken to Moses, and

by him hath commanded you . . . and the multitude have forgotten to do it: they shall offer a calf out of the herd, a holocaust for a most sweet savor to the Lord . . . . and a buck-goat for sin . . . and it shall be forgiven them, because they sinned ignorantly, offering notwithstanding a burnt offering to the Lord for themselves and for their sin and their ignorance . . . because it is the fault of all the people, through ignorance . . . But if one soul shall sin ignorantly, he shall offer a she-goat of a year old for his sin . . . The same law shall be for all that sin by ignorance, whether they be natives or strangers."[1] Read the second chapter of Leviticus, and you will find a detailed description of the sacrifices that had to be offered in atonement for sins committed through ignorance by a priest, a prince, the whole community, or a private individual. In the latter case the sacred text says: "And if any one of the people of the land shall sin through ignorance, doing any of these things, that by the law of the Lord are forbidden and offending, and shall come to know his sin, he shall offer a she-goat without blemish" . . . and the priest "shall pray for him, and it shall be forgiven him."[2]

They will be punished by God.

If our ignorance could excuse us before God, why did the penitent David, in fear and dread of impending punishment, cry out to God: "My ignorances do not remember?"[3] He should rather have put them forward as an excuse, and have said: O dear Lord, do not forget that I did not know what I was doing; remember my ignorances, I pray Thee; for if they can excuse me from sin, there is nothing better for me than that Thou shouldst remember them. But such is not the prayer of the enlightened Prophet; he says rather: "My ignorances do not remember;" blot them. O Lord, out of that terrible book, which Thou wilt one day open against me, and out of which I shall be judged; pardon me for them now, and I will do penance. And why does the Wise Ecclesiasticus pray so earnestly to God, "O Lord Father and Sovereign Ruler of my

[1] Quodsi per ignorantiam, præterieritis quidquam horum, quæ locutus est Dominus ad Moysen, . . . oblitaque fuerit facere multitudo: offeret vitulum de armento, holocaustum in odorem suavissimum Domino, . . . hircumque pro peccato . . . Quod si anima una nesciens peccaverit, offeret capram anniculam pro peccato suo . . . Tam indigenis quam advenis una lex erit omnium, qui peccaverint ignorantes.—Num. xv. 22–29.

[2] Quodsi peccaverit anima per ignorantiam, de populo terræ, ut faciat quidquam de his quæ Domini lege prohibentur, atque delinquat, et cognoverit peccatum suum, offeret capram immaculatam . . . rogabitque pro eo, et pro peccato ejus, et dimittetur ei.—Levit. iv. 27, 28, 31.

[3] Ignorantias meas ne memineris?—Ps. xxiv. 7.

life," save me from my enemies, "lest my ignorances increase, and my offences be multiplied, and my sins abound, and I fall before my adversaries, and my enemy rejoice over me."[1] If ignorance could excuse us from sin, why did the most just and merciful God punish it so severely in the Old Law? Hear what He says by the Prophet Isaias: "Therefore is My people led away captive, because they had not knowledge, and their nobles have perished with famine. Therefore hath hell enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds, and their strong ones, and their people, and their high and glorious ones shall go down into it."[2] And why, O just God? What have Thy people done? "Because they had not knowledge." In the Fourth Book of Kings the same is said of the Assyrians, who were torn to pieces by lions: "The nations . . . know not the ordinances of the God of the land; and the Lord hath sent lions among them: and behold, they kill them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land."[3] But, O God of goodness, all these people had no knowledge of Thy law; why, then, dost Thou punish them so severely? Is it their fault that they did not observe that of which they knew nothing? Yes; for they could and should have known it; they had teachers enough; the Lord sent them prophets; but yet they had not knowledge, because they did not earnestly desire it. They did not wish to understand that certain sensual indulgences are sinful, and so they were unchaste; they did not wish to understand that certain contracts are invalid, and so they were unjust: they did not wish to understand that all revenge is forbidden, and so they were vindictive; thus their ignorance went on increasing, until they fell into idolatry at last. There is no doubt, then, that it is not every ignorance that can excuse or justify us for the sins that we commit on account of it.

In our days there is no excuse for Christians.

And to put the matter briefly, my dear brethren, there can be but few in our days, in this part of the world, who can put forward ignorance as an excuse for their sins. Why do I say that? Because we have, or at least easily can have, too much light and

[1] Domine Pater et dominator vitæ meæ, . . . ne adincrescant ignorantiæ meæ, et multiplicentur delicta mea, et peccata mea abundent, et incidam in conspectu adversariorum meorum, et gaudeat super me inimicus meus.—Ecclus. xxiii. 1, 3.

[2] Propterea captivus ductus est populus meus, quia non habuit scientiam, et nobiles ejus interierunt fame, propterea dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino, et descendent fortes ejus, et populus ejus, et sublimes, gloriosique ejus ad eum.—Is. v. 13, 14.

[3] Gentes . . . ignorant legitima Dei terræ: et immisit in eos Dominus leones, et ecce interficiunt eos, eo quod ignorent ritum Dei terræ.—IV. Kings xvii. 26.

knowledge about those things that concern the divine law and our eternal salvation. "If I had not come and spoken to them," said Our Lord of the Jews who persecuted Him because they would not acknowledge His divinity, "they would not have sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin;"[1] for they have seen the miracles I have wrought, and have heard My sermons and exhortations, and therefore it is through culpable ignorance that they refuse to acknowledge My divinity. Christians, if we were in the middle of a desert, or in Japan, from which all Catholics are excluded, or if we had to live amongst heathens and Turks, so that we could learn nothing about the Gospel truths; or if those truths were declared to us only in figures and parables, as they formerly were in the Old Law; or if the times were now as they were a few hundred years ago, when heresies and persecutions were troubling the Church to such an extent that the word of God could hardly be preached to the people; then, perhaps, we might have some hope that ignorance and the want of proper instruction would excuse our sins before the judgment-seat of God, so that we could say to Him: I have sinned, O Lord, but I knew not what I was doing; there was no one to teach me the way to heaven, or to instruct me in Thy law, and therefore I could not know anything about it. But in a country, in a city, in which sound Catholic doctrine is taught; at a time when the word of God is preached so freely in so many churches, and when so frequently on Sundays and holydays the Christian doctrine is explained from the pulpit and in the confessional, and when it is so easy to ask the advice of learned and pious priests; if, I say, one of us, under those circumstances, were to attempt to excuse himself on account of ignorance (unless indeed he had lost the use of reason) and to say: I have sinned because I knew no better; I have sinned in ignorance, his excuse would not be of the least value before the all-seeing God.

On account of the many opportunities they have of learning their duty.

And he would make a mistake like that of the rich man in the Gospel, who put forward the ignorance of his brethren, who were still on earth, as a reason for Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them, that they too should not come to the same place of torments. And what answer did he get? "And Abraham said to him: They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them;"[2]

[1] Si non venissem, et locutus fuissem eis, peccatum non haberent: nunc autem excusationem non habent de peccato suo.—John xv. 22.

[2] Ait illi Abraham: habent Moysen et prophetas: audiant illos.—Luke xvi. 29.

it is not necessary to send any one to them from the dead; the prophets can tell them what they have to do in order to escape hell; let them hear them, and follow their salutary exhortations; if they refuse to do that, their destruction will be their own work. Now come forward, you ignorant Christians, and say that you could not help committing sin, because you knew not what you were doing! You could not help it? And who could help it, then? The Almighty God perhaps, who could have given you greater knowledge? You ought to wait, then, to see if He will not send an angel from heaven or a Lazarus from the dead to instruct you. No; you have Moses and the prophets. You had your prophets, He will say; I have caused My law and My Gospel to be clearly explained to you; you were not wanting in understanding, and, besides, I have often given you good inspirations. For what else is the meaning of those doubts and suspicions, of that secret fear and anxiety you feel, lest some thing you are about to do be a sin? You should have tried to set your doubts at rest; but you did not do so, and therefore you have only yourself to blame. Was it not your fault that you did not know your duty? And whose was it if not that of the spiritual guides and preachers who did not explain the divine law, or correct your vices? (I shudder when I think of the great responsibility that rests on them.) But, God be praised, there were good prophets enough; why did you not hear them? You seldom came to a sermon; did you expect them to go after you? Therefore you have no excuse for your sin; you must attribute your ignorance to your own laziness and carelessness, and to the sensuality, love of comfort, and vanity in dress that prevented you from coming to sermons; or you must put it down to your over-indulgence in sleep, or to the temporal cares that engrossed you to such an extent that you paid no attention to the all-important business of your soul. In a word, you can blame no one but yourself, and you have no excuse before God, because your ignorance is culpable.

Such ignorance will be put to shame in the judgment.

Nay, I say even more than that; your ignorance will accuse and put you to shame on the day of judgment, on account of the prudence and knowledge you display in matters that concern your bodily well-being, your honor, and your temporal goods, which are often more difficult to understand than the law of God, although you are never wanting in wisdom or knowledge regarding them. If there is a dollar profit to be made, or a chance of doing a good stroke of business, oh, how active and

eager you become all at once, how you hurry out of bed and rush off immediately, so as to lose no time! How accurately you can weigh every circumstance so as to ensure success! How careful you are to avoid mistakes! How diligent in profiting by every favorable opportunity! If there were any one who could teach the art of making fifty dollars a day, I think there is hardly one who would not go to school to him. See, the divine Judge will say, how wise and prudent you were in earthly things; why were you not equally careful in those that concerned your immortal soul and its eternal salvation? These latter you trusted to chance, without consideration or anxiety, as if they were of no importance. Hence your ignorance will be condemned by so many simple peasants, nay, by so many heathens and infidels, who had not the light and instruction, nor the opportunities of doing good, nor the examples of virtue that you have or can have every day; and these people, with the light of reason alone to guide them, led better lives than you lead. There is no excuse, then, for your sin; but you have rather to fear greater confusion and a deeper damnation on account of the culpable ignorance through which your sins were committed.

Conclusion and resolution to follow the divine light more carefully.

Ah, my Lord and my God, what shall I say to justify myself? I cannot deny, but must acknowledge with a thankful heart that Thou hast hitherto been generous enough in enlightening me; but I must also confess with sorrow and repentance that I have made a bad use of the lights Thou hast given me! Oh, how much good I have omitted, how much evil I have done through culpable ignorance, for I could and should have known better! There is nothing for me now but with Thy penitent servant David to acknowledge humbly my guilt, and to say with him: O Lord, "my ignorances do not remember." Pardon me according to the multitude of Thy mercies! I will be more careful henceforward in the most important affair of my soul and its eternal salvation! I will seek the truth and the understanding of Thy law by being diligent in hearing Thy divine word, and in asking advice of Thy servants in all matters concerning which I have a doubt in conscience. Never will I do, say, or omit anything until I shall have first fully considered whether it is in strict accordance with Thy divine law. Never more shall I look to what others like me do, but rather to what I am bound to do according to Thy law; nor to what the vain customs of the world might exact, but rather to what my last end requires of me, that I may know Thee, my Sovereign Good, love Thee with

my whole heart above all things, and after this short life, enjoy Thee with Thy elect forever in heaven. Amen.

TENTH SERMON.

ON THE BLINDNESS AND OBDURACY OF THE SINNER, AS A PUNISHMENT OF SIN.

Subject.

1. In what this blindness consists, and how God inflicts it on man as a punishment for his sins. 2. This punishment is the most dreadful of all evils.—*Preached on the fifth Sunday in Lent.*

Text.

Propterea vos non auditis, quia ex Deo non estis.—John. viii. 47. "Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God."

Introduction.

What terrible words these are! "He that is of God heareth the words of God. Therefore you hear them not, because you are not of God;" you are abandoned and rejected by God, you will have no part in Him, and you will die in your wickedness, and be lost forever. This was the most fearful punishment that was inflicted on the Jews, and it was one that Our Lord had often foretold to them with tears in His eyes, namely, that they should become blind and obstinate, and should be rejected by God. I have already spoken, my dear brethren, of two kinds of spiritual blindness, the first of which is in itself a sin, and a most grievous sin, because on account of it one flies the light so as to have no knowledge of good and evil; while the second is the cause of many sins, and consists in a culpable ignorance of the divine law and of the duties of a Christian. I now go on to speak of the third kind of blindness, which is the greatest punishment of sin.

Plan of Discourse.

In what this blindness consists, and how God inflicts it on man as a punishment for his sins; that I shall explain in the first part. That this punishment is the most dreadful of all evils, I shall show in the second part.

O dearest Saviour, I have now only one request to make of Thee: I beg of Thee, by all that is most dear to Thee, to grant that there may be no one in the world to whom this sermon of mine may be applied, and that in this large congregation there may not be one who is in the lamentable state of which I am going to speak; for the only object I aim at is to inspire every one with an irreconcilable hatred, horror, and detestation of all sin. If, nevertheless, contrary to my hopes, there should unfortunately be any one here present who is sunk so deeply, then I beg of him, if he has the least desire of salvation left, to open his eyes now, as this may be the last chance he will get in this life, in order that he may see the miserable state in which he is, and do penance at once. Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, O holy angels, obtain for us the light of the Holy Ghost: for me, that I may rightly explain the truth; and for all who are listening to me, that they may understand it aright, and henceforth avoid sin more than any other evil.

Every sinner is blind.

Let no one imagine that I am now going to speak of corporal blindness; although, if that were the only punishment inflicted by the divine justice on our sins, it would certainly be enough to deter every sensible man from sin. For who is there among you, my dear brethren, who, if he knew for certain that he would be struck blind after offending God, so that he would nevermore see the light of day; who, I say, would wish to pay so dearly for a momentary and brutal pleasure, for a worthless and perishable gain, or for some forbidden enjoyment, such as sinners find in creatures? If I know you well, there is not one of you who would be so foolish. But this is not the blindness with which an angry God punishes sinners, otherwise I should not feel so much pity for them; but there is a blindness that is all the more deplorable, as the soul is more precious than the body. We have bodily eyes in common with the meanest creature that crawls the earth; it is the light, the eyes of the soul, that makes us like the angels, nay, like even to God Himself. Your one, precious, and immortal soul, O sinners, is thrown into exterior darkness and is stricken with the most deplorable blindness by sin. A punishment, alas! that we are all the more insensible to, the more we rob ourselves of the light. Nor is it my intention now to speak of the blindness that is common to all sinners; for every sinner, even the first time he grievously trangresses the law of God, foolishly deprives himself of the favor of God and sanctifying grace, which is the light of the soul; and as if he were incapable

of seeing what he is doing, chooses earth instead of heaven, a creature instead of the Creator, and the fire of hell instead of eternal happiness. Wherefore all sinners deserve to be called blind, and St. Paul speaks of sins as the works of darkness: "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness," he writes to the Romans, "and put on the armor of light."[1]

Blindness and obduracy come from long-continued habits of sin.

The subject of my sermon to-day is another and most terrible spiritual blindness, which arises from committing grievous sin over and over again, and from long-continued habits of vice, and it is called a blinding of the understanding and a hardening of the will in wickedness;[2] and, amongst other punishments, it is threatened to those who refuse to hear the voice of God calling them. "But if thou wilt not hear the voice of the Lord thy God," are the terrible words we read in the Book of Deuteronomy, "the Lord strike thee with madness and blindness and fury of mind, and mayest thou grope at midday as the blind is wont to grope in the dark, and not make straight thy ways."[3] Of that blindness St. Paul says: "Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified Him as God . . .their foolish heart was darkened . . . God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient,"[4] that they may be filled with all kinds of iniquity and wickedness. With this blindness and obduracy God justly punished king Pharao, who had so often disobeyed Him: "and the Lord hardened Pharao's heart . . . and his heart was hardened, and the heart of his servants, and it was made exceeding hard."[5] So that the plagues he had to suffer only made him more obstinate in refusing to obey the divine command, and let the people of Israel go; but when at length he did let them go, he repented of having done so, pursued them with his whole army, ventured rashly into the Red Sea, in the face of an evident miracle wrought in favor of the Israelites, and was drowned with all his army. As St. John the Evangelist writes, the same blindness was inflicted by God on the obstinate Jews: "He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart: that they should not see with their eyes, nor under-

[1] Abjiciamus ergo opera tenebrarum, et induamur arma lucis.—Rom. xiii. 12.

[2] Excæcatio et obduratio mentis.

[3] Quodsi audire nolueris vocem Domini Dei tui .... percutiat te Dominus amentia ac cæcitate, ac furore mentis, et palpes in meridie, sicut palpare solet caecus in tenebris, et non dirigas vias tuas.—Deut. xxviii. 15, 28.

[4] Quia cum cognovissent Deum, non sicut Deum glorificaverunt .... obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum .... tradidit illos Deus in reprobum sensum, ut faciant ea quæ non conveniunt.—Rom. i. 21, 28.

[5] Induravitque Dominus cor Pharaonis ....et ingravatum est cor ejus, et servorum illius, et induratum nimis.—Exod. ix. 12, 35.

stand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them."[1]

In what they consist.

Hence this punishment consists in the fact that God, as it were, abandons man altogether, and excludes him from His fatherly care, so that he can neither see nor understand anything good with his understanding, nor accomplish anything good with his will; and thus nothing is left for him but eternal damnation, as St. Augustine says.[2] They are abandoned by God and rejected by Him, that they may commit all the sins they are damned for. O merciful God, Thou art the Author of light, for Thou enlightenest every man that cometh into the world. Thou sayest of Thyself: "I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."[3] How then can it be that Thou blindest man, takest away all light from him, and hardenest his heart in wickedness, so that he may not be converted to Thee, but be lost forever? Yes, my dear brethren, it is even the infinitely good and merciful God who thus severely punishes man, when He has borne with his sins for a long time, and often exhorted and warned him to no purpose. Nor is this punishment too severe, for, as St. Augustine says, it is in accordance with the strictest justice: "It is a most just punishment of sin that one should lose that which he would not make a good use of . . . and that he who deliberately omits to do good, should at last neither know nor understand what good is."[4] Such, too, is the meaning of the words of St. Bernard regarding those philosophers of whom St. Paul speaks: "with justice is their foolish heart darkened: for, since they rejected the known truth, it is only right that they should be punished by having the light taken away from them, so that they can no longer see the truth."[5] Such, too, is the way in which the Holy Catholic Church acts, as well as temporal superiors, in the excommunication or banishment of those in whom no signs of improvement are to be observed, after repeated admonition; for those disobedient subjects are cut off from the society of the faithful as if the Church wished to know nothing more of them.

God inflicts the punish-

But that no one, my dear brethren, may have a mistaken idea

[1] Excæcavit oculos eorum, et induravit cor eorum, ut non videant oculis, et non intelligant corde, et convertantur, et sanem eos.—John xii. 40.

[2] Utique damnati, ut tanta operentur mala.

[3] Nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Exod. xxxiii. 11.

[4] Illa est poena peccati justissima, ut amittat unusquisque illud quo bene uti noluit . . . ut qui sciens recte non facit, amittat scire quod rectum est.

[5] Merito obscuratum est insipiens cor eorum, quia, cum veritatem cognoscerent et contemnerent, jure receperunt in pœnam, ut nec cognoscerent eam.—S. Bern. Ep. 19.

of the mercy of God in this matter, as if He deliberately planned the eternal ruin of a man by increasing his guilt, you must not forget how this punishment of blindness and obduracy is inflicted by God. Our God is infinitely good, and patient, and merciful; He never abandons man unless the latter abandon him for too long a time altogether. He does not and cannot wish any one to commit sin, nor can He, nor will He condemn any one to hell who does not himself elect to go there; He rejects no sinner, no matter how great his guilt may be, who does true penance; and He is prepared to receive into His friendship even the most wicked sinner who does penance even at the last moment of his life. Such is the teaching of the infallible word of God in Holy Scripture; such, too, is the experience of many great sinners. If God intended first to abandon us, says St. Augustine, why did He send His Only-begotten Son down on earth to redeem all men, and show them the way to heaven? Why should that Son have allowed Himself to be so cruelly tortured, and to be nailed to the cross for our sake? No, once for all, it is and must be true, that the good God does not wish the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live. But now, see how He allows the sinner to become blind and obdurate. After He has given to a man many special graces for a long time, and, as often is the case, for many long years borne with his sins with the greatest patience, but sees that His inspirations are always rejected and despised, that the man constantly relapses into his former sins after confession, and through malice, and so makes a bad use of His patience and goodness, while there is no sign of amendment: what does God do then? In order to avenge Himself for the contempt with which he has been so persistently treated, He withdraws from the sinner the graces that He is not at all bound to give him, and which He has hitherto bestowed on him solely out of the superabundance of His goodness. Consequently He no longer gives him such a clear knowledge of the Gospel truths, nor does He bestow such vivid lights on his understanding, as to make him see and dread the malice and deformity of sin, the short duration of the pleasure to be derived from it, and the eternity of the pains that have to be suffered for it in hell. Thus he has greater difficulty in avoiding sin. Nor does God any longer give him those impulses and inward movements of the will, which we otherwise feel so sweet and refreshing, that we can easily keep His law, mortify our sensuality and evil inclinations, perform the works of Christian piety and charity, bear

ment on sinners by withdrawing from them His special graces.

crosses and trials patiently, practise virtue with ease and facility, and find such strength in dangers that we can overcome them easily. These graces, I say, which God is not bound to give to any one, He withdraws from the obstinate sinner, and delivers him over to his own desires and inclinations, as He says by the Prophet David, "My people heard not My voice: and Israel hearkened not to Me. So I let them go according to the desires of their heart; they shall walk in their own inventions."[1] And they will do all that sensuality and their own will may suggest to them.

Then the desire for sin increases continually.

Now, when these graces are thus withdrawn from the sinner and he is given over to his own desires, what happens to him? Alas, the same that happened to our dear Lord, when Pilate delivered Him over to the will of the Jews: "But Jesus he delivered up to their will;"[2] they fell upon Him like wolves, dragged Him off to Calvary, and there cruelly murdered Him. O sinner, are you given over to your own evil inclinations? Alas, what will become of you? Nothing else can be the result but that your understanding will be blinded and your will hardened. For when those special graces of God no longer impel you to good and restrain you from evil, if the least temptation or occasion of sin, such as we are daily exposed to, assails you, you will consent to it without the least hesitation, fear, or shame; from one sin you will fall into another, from that into a third, and so on, until your sins are beyond counting. For, says St. Thomas, as the just man cannot long refrain from all venial sin on account of his inborn weakness, so also he who is in mortal sin will have even greater difficulty in avoiding fresh sin. If you throw a stone into a pond, it will at once make a circle in the water; this circle will make another, the other a third, and so it goes on until the last circle is so far away that it vanishes out of sight. So it is also with the heart of the wicked man, that the Holy Scripture compares to a stormy sea. "But the wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest."[3] says the Lord by the Prophet Isaias; and one sin is constantly urging on the other therein without rest. From this comes the habit of sin, from the habit arises a concatenation of vices, an ever increasing circle of abominations, a deplorable ebb and flow of sin, and finally a natural necessity, as it were of sinning, as St. Augustine

[1] Non audivit populus meus vocem meam, et Israel non intendit mihi; et dimisi eos secundum desideria cordis eorum: ibunt in adinventionibus suis.—Ps. lxxx. 12, 13.

[2] Jesum vero tradidit voluntati eorum.—Luke xxiii. 25.

[3] Impii autem quasi mare fervens, quod quiescere non potest.—Is. lvii. 20.

says; so that it is almost impossible to the sinner to amend, nor do his sins cease unless with his life, and when he is already at the gate of eternal death.

And on the other hand there arises a dislike to everything good; the desire for prayer disappears, the church is seldom visited, the holy sacraments and all works of devotion cause disgust, there is no relish for the word of God, and therefore the sinner hears no more sermons, or, if he does hear them, it is only to satisfy his curiosity, or to criticise the preacher; the desire and inordinate love of temporal goods increase more and more; there is a perpetual sighing with the Jews for the flesh-pots of Egypt, that brings with it a disgust for the bread of heaven; and, like the prodigal son, there is no longer any relish except for the husks of swine. All this will at last cause the heart to become so hardened, that it will become insensible to exhortations and threats alike. God in His mercy may be generous to him, and bestow abundant temporal blessings on him, but his ingratitude will only be the greater; with the best intentions towards him, God may visit him with trials and adversity, but, like Pharao, he will only become more obstinate. "I fed them to the full," is the complaint God makes of those people by the Prophet Jeremias, "and they committed adultery."[1] "Thou hast struck them," says the same Prophet to the Lord, "and they have not grieved; Thou hast bruised them, and they have refused to receive correction; they have made their faces harder than the rock, and they have refused to return."[2] "They have denied the Lord, and said: It is not He;"[3] this punishment, they say, does not come from God; this misfortune has happened to me by mere chance; they are insensible to everything that happens to them, like the stone pillar in the field that remains unaffected by wind, rain, or hail. Pious people may talk kindly to them, or try to encourage them to do good by example, but to no purpose except to excite their ridicule; they look on pious, humble, and chaste souls as superstitious and miserable fools.

And the dislike to good works.

And what is there to be suprised at in that? The obdurate sinner is blinded once for all, and he is incapable, so to speak, of discerning between good and evil, between what is reprehensible and what is praiseworthy: "They have not known nor

And finally complete blindness in spiritual things.

[1] Saturavi eos, et mœchati sunt.—Jerem v. 7.

[2] Percussisti eos, et non doluerunt; attrivisti eos, et renuerunt accipere disciplinam; induraverunt facies suas supra petram, et noluerunt reverti.—Ibid. 3.

[3] Negaverunt Dominum, et dixerunt: non est ipse.—Ibid. 12.

understood, they walk on in darkness."[1] If you represent to him the joys of heaven which he loses by mortal sin, he neither knows nor understands what you are speaking of. Open to him, if you can, the abyss of hell, show him the thousands of souls actually burning there, the hideous and cruel demons, the fearful phantoms, the burning lake of sulphur, the inextinguishable fire, the intolerable eternal pain in which he has already set his foot, and to which he will certainly be condemned if he does not repent; he will not understand anything of what you say. Remind him of the shortness of life, a single moment of which he cannot be sure of, the uncertainty of death, which generally surprises the sinner, but you will make no impression on him; you might as well be talking to a blind man of color, or tell the news to one who is asleep. "He speaketh with one that is asleep," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "who uttereth wisdom to a fool; and in the end of the discourse he saith: Who is this?"[2] He who is called or disturbed in the midst of a deep sleep, at once asks; Who is that? Who is calling me? What do you want? And he falls off to sleep again. O great Apostle, St. Paul, who hast converted so many souls by thy preaching, call out into the ears of those hardened sinners that exhortation of thine, "Be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine."[3] But thou wilt do them little good, for "They have not known nor understood; they walk on in darkness." They know nothing of what thou sayest to them, because the light of the soul has been taken away from them. "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth; but ignominy and reproach follow him."[4] The loss of eternal happiness, the bitterness of death, the pains of hell, the remembrance of which used formerly to send a shudder through him, he now utterly disregards; since he has sunk into the depth of sin, he is no longer afraid of those things; nay, he laughs at them, and affects to disbelieve them; he looks on them as a dream, as mere talk of the priests, mere pointless arrows which cannot hurt; and, as St. Athanasius says, he is no more frightened at them than a blacksmith's dog is at the hammering to which he has long grown accustomed. Meanwhile,

[1] Nescierunt neque intellexerunt, in tenebris ambulant.—Ps. lxxxi. 5.

[2] Cum dormiente loquitur, qui enarrat stulto sapientiam, et in fine narrationis dicit: quis est hic?—Ecclus. xxii. 9.

[3] Insta opportune, importune; argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia et doctrina.—II. Tim. iv. 2.

[4] Impius cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit; sed sequitur eum ignominia et opprobrium.—Prov. xviii. 3.

since he loses more and more every day the light and knowledge of divine things, whilst his wickedness is daily on the increase, he at length goes so far that he does not wish to be better, and cannot be worse, and even if it were possible for him to do penance, he would be as far off from it as the demons themselves. Such, my dear brethren, is the state of a blind and hardened sinner, such is the punishment that an angry God inflicts on man for his obstinacy in wickedness. Let these words resound in the ears of all sinners who are still capable of hearing them. Could a greater punishment than this be imagined? No; it is impossible, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

It is the greatest punishment.

A punishment that is an unmixed evil, and has no good whatever in it, is certainly the greatest of all. Such a punishment is the blindness and obduracy of the sinner in wickedness. All other evils, no matter by what name they are called, are indeed just punishments for sins committed; but if one only knows how to make the proper use of them, they are at the same time means of attaining eternal life more securely, and therefore they are rightly reckoned amongst the benefits and graces of God. They are, says St. John Chrysostom, evils which by their severity purify and cleanse our souls, make us enter into ourselves and see the vanity and deceitfulness of earthly things; they force us, as it were, to seek God; they are evils which serve to satisfy for our past sins, to help us to persevere in faith and good works, preserve us from fresh sin, and increase our merit and our glory in heaven; they are, in a word, evils that make us good and holy; but the blindness of the soul is an evil above all others, because no profit or advantage can be reaped from it.

Remorse of conscience is a grace, when compared to it.

Have you sinned, O man? Have you even grievously and shamefully sinned? Have you sinned continuously for years and years? But do you feel remorse of conscience? have you neither pleasure by day nor repose by night? do you continually hear a voice calling in your ear: What hast thou done? Thou art an enemy of God, a slave of the devil, a child of damnation. Certainly, as long as that lash is scourging you, you are suffering severely; but after all, be comforted and rejoice, because all is not lost for you yet; the light of your soul is not yet altogether extinguished; God has not abandoned you; He is actually knocking at your door, and calling you back to His grace and friendship; the torture your conscience causes you, cruel as it is, can

and will, if you are so minded, bring you back to penance, to God, to heaven. This is the testimony that St. Augustine, who was first a sink of vice, and afterwards an exemplar of penance and a vessel of election, gives of himself: "This very thing, my God," he says, "was for my good."[1] It was this that saved me from the thraldom of the devil; namely, my conscience, which daily and hourly was fighting against Thee and against myself. It was the bitter, but salutary scourge of conscience that forced me to return to Thee. See there, my dear brethren, the gnawing worm of conscience is indeed a punishment; but it is a salutary one.

And all other evils are salutary punishments.

If God sends me other trials:—for instance, He casts me down on a bed of sickness; I am reduced by misfortune to extreme poverty and destitution; I am persecuted by men, and put to shame before all my fellow-citizens; I am left desolate by the death of my parents and dear friends: all that is hard, without doubt; but still I can find consolation in all these trials and difficulties. Oh, how happy I am if I know how to use them properly! For I can raise up my mind to heaven, and say: Blessed be Thou, my Lord and my God, who chastisest me with Thy rod, as a loving father chastises his children! This sickness, poverty, misfortune, persecution, shame, and abandonment which Thou sendest me, is in Thy merciful designs a school in which I can learn patience, an easy purgatory in which to atone for my sins, and a certain means of escaping hell and gaining heaven. I have already misused, or may perhaps misuse, my health to indulge in unlawful pleasures; if Thou hadst given, or left me wealth, I might perhaps have used it to lead a luxurious or an idle life, or to extol myself above others; but now, since Thou hast not given, or hast taken away those things from me, Thou hast shown me the vanity of this life, freed my heart from earthly things, and raised my desires to heaven, so that my punishment is a most salutary medicine for me. Before now I had a horror of penance, fasting, and bodily austerities, and I used to seek in all things the gratification of my sensuality; now Thou compellest me to suffer something for my sins, so that my punishment serves as an atonement for them. I was before lazy and slothful in Thy service, O my God; I have done little or nothing for Thy honor and glory; now Thou givest me an opportunity of doing something for Thee, so that the punishment I suffer is a sanctifying one for me. Thus, my dear

[1] Hoc ipsum est, Domine Deus, quod mihi saluti fuit.

brethren, in every evil and chastisement that is incurred by sin, there is something good and consoling which lessens the pain one has to suffer.

Obduracy is a sure sign of eternal damnation.

But in the blindness and obduracy of the soul there is no hope of amendment, no satisfaction, no merit. God inflicts that punishment, but man can draw no profit from it. In fact, there is hardly any difference between it and the punishment of the lost souls in hell, the most terrible feature of which is, that the damned, with all their torments, can never satisfy God for their sins, and the more they suffer, the more hardened do they become in wickedness. In the same way spiritual blindness daily increases the number of sins and vices, makes the heart more wicked, embitters more and more the divine anger, and adds every hour to the future pains of hell. Hence it is evidently not only the most terrible of punishments, but also a certain sign of eternal reprobation. That, as St. John Chrysostom remarks, was the punishment that an angry God commanded the Prophet Isaias to announce to the Jewish people, when He was minded to chastise them most severely: "Blind the heart of this people, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them."[1] He did not say: humble the intolerable pride of that people; strike them dead; destroy them utterly. No, for all that seemed too slight a punishment, nay, no punishment at all, when compared to spiritual blindness. "Blind the heart of this people;" as if to say, this is the only punishment with which I can most severely avenge the insults offered Me. War, pestilence, famine, and all other plagues are not enough for those rebels; I will fill their souls with gloom and darkness, so that they may not understand or do any good. That is the terrible woe that the same angry God announces by the Prophet Osee to those inveterate sinners who are hardened in wickedness: "Woe to them when I shall depart from them."[2]

Therefore this is the only punishment from which one should

This is the anger and resentment of the Lord from which the penitent David, with sighs and tears, begs to be delivered: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath."[3] Thou hast taken my beloved child out of the world;

[1] Excæca cor populi hujus, et aures ejus aggrava, et oculos ejus claude, ne forte videat oculis suis, et auribus suis audiat, et corde suo intelligat, et convertatur, et sanem eum.—Is. vi. 10.

[2] Væ eis, cum recessero ab eis.—Osee ix. 12.

[3] Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me, neque in ira tua corripias me.—Ps. vi. 2.

beg to be delivered.

my own son has made war on, and persecuted me; Thou hast decimated my people by pestilence. But all that, O Lord, I accept with resignation.[1] Yes, O merciful God, I kiss the fatherly hand that chastises me; I am ready to suffer still more punishments of the same kind; but one thing I beg of Thee, "Rebuke me not in Thy indignation," nor with such anger as to give me over to my own desires, and to allow me to become blind and hardened in wickedness. Alas, woe to the man whom God thus punishes in His anger; for no worse punishment, but hell itself, can await him! Yet, why do I speak of a worse punishment? Is it not, asks St. Ambrose, a favor for such sinners to have their damnation hastened? If, O Lord, I should ever be in that most miserable state, which I fervently hope I never shall be; if I should become obdurate and be rejected by Thee; if I should give up all idea of repentance, then, if I can still ask a favor of Thee, take me out of the world at once, O Lord, and hasten the damnation that awaits me! Give me up to the demons; kindle the flames of hell for me, and hurl me at once into the place of my eternal torments! But what am I saying? Is it not time enough for me to go down into hell after ten or twenty years? No, O God, hasten my damnation; better for me to go now, than next year; to-day, than to-morrow; this very hour, than this evening. This is the greatest favor Thou canst do me in my present unhappy state, that Thou sendest me at once to the hell I have deserved! You are scandalized, my dear brethren, at this despairing prayer; but the idea is not mine; I have taken it from St. Ambrose. "It is better for sinners to die," he says "than to live."[2] So said also Our Lord to the traitor Judas at the Last Supper: "That which thou dost, do quickly."[3] Delay no longer about it! Thou hast the intention of betraying Me to My enemies, and thou wilt hang thyself and go down to hell; delay no longer, then, but do so at once. And why? Because the longer such sinners live, the more sins they commit, as we have seen already; and the greater the number of their sins, the more severe will be their eternal punishment. Therefore it is better for them to go down to hell a day, a year, ten, or twenty years sooner, than for them to live longer on earth, and increase a hundred thousand fold the eternal punishment that is in store for them in any case. Therefore God confers a favor on

[1] Virga tua et baculus tuus: ipsa me consolata sunt.—Ps. xxii. 4.
[2] Melius est peccatoribus mori quam vivere.—S. Amb. lib. de bono mortis.
[3] Quod facis, fac citius.—John xiii. 27.

them (but alas, what a wretched favor it is!) by hastening their damnation.

Conclusion for hardened sinners.

O sinners, who are blind, and hardened, and obdurate in vice, listen to me now, in whatever part of the world you may be; ah! open your eyes, I beg of you! give up sin, try to get the grace of repentance, which will be refused to no one as long as he lives; be converted to God, and at once; do not wait till to-morrow, for to-morrow your case will be still more desperate! But what is the use of my talking to them? They have neither hearing, nor sight, nor understanding any longer. They can indeed do penance and amend, for that is never impossible; but they will never do it, because they will never wish to do it. "Let them alone," said Christ to His disciples of the hardened Pharisees, "they are blind."[1] O merciful Lord, must we let them alone? And what will become of them? They will be lost forever. Must we, then, look on while they are going on the way to hell, and not stretch out a hand to save them? Yes, let them alone; let them go to their destruction, because they are blind; take no further trouble concerning them; any labor spent in trying to convert them is fruitless; they are blind. "Let them alone!" O fearful words! O words that are not words, but rather hail-storms and thunderbolts! Let hardened sinners alone! Is there, then, no more hope of their conversion? Are they rejected by God and condemned to hell? Then all I can do is to say to them, alas! I pity you; I pity your miserable state, your precious souls, and, unless a miracle of grace is worked to bring you back again to the light, I pity you on account of the unhappy eternity that awaits you!

Exhortation to the other hearers to avoid sin.

Finally, my dear brethren, I have a word to say to you, for I hope that not one of you is in that miserable state of blindness, and, in fact, the only object I have aimed at in this sermon is to give you a salutary warning that may deter you from ever falling into it. Ah, may God keep you and me from it! "Walk whilst you have the light;"[2] now, whilst your eyes are open, walk carefully in the exact observance of the divine commands; work out your salvation in fear, humility, and child-like love of God; hate and avoid sin alone above all things, as far as you can; see that you never get into a habit of sinning, for that is the next step to obduracy. If you are already in the habit of sin, and trammelled by an inordinate love of any creature, oh,

[1] Sinite illos; cæci sunt.—Matt. xv. 14.
[2] Ambulate dum lucem habetis.—John xii. 35.

then, at once make a heroic resolution, and by speedy penance free yourselves from that state, "that the darkness overtake you not."[1] Have you done penance already? Then keep to it, and see that you never commit another mortal sin. Perhaps the next sin you commit may be the one which will so excite the anger and indignation of God, that, according to His inscrutable and at the same time most just decrees, He will withdraw His light from you, and leave you in blindness, a prey to your own desires. Say to yourselves every morning and evening: How many sins have I not committed during my life? Is it not time for me to leave off sinning now?

Prayer to God to save all from falling into that state.

And Thou, O God of mercy, Source of all good, if there are any here present who have often excited Thy anger by sin; if there are any who have made a habit of a certain vice; if there are any who, being in the state of sin, have not yet done penance, but continue to offend Thee; for all these, O Lord, I may still send up a petition to Thee, O God of mercy; not in the words, "Blind the heart of this people," but in those of Thy penitent servant David, "Lord rebuke me not in Thy anger;" punish them not in Thy wrath, so as to take away the eyes of their souls! If Thou art determined to be angry with them, and I must confess with them that we have deserved Thy anger a hundred times, then pour out the vials of Thy wrath on them, but of that wrath which St. Bernard prayed for from Thee: "I wish, O Father of mercy, that Thou shouldst be angry with me; but with the anger that brings back the erring soul to the right path, and does not drive it off the road altogether."[2] If Thou hast resolved to punish them, if Thou canst no longer overlook their wickedness, then take in hand Thy fatherly rod, and not the sword of Thy wrath; punish them therewith as Thou wilt; avenge Thyself on their honor, on their bodies, on their temporal goods; but have pity on their souls, that they may not be hardened! Send them all the trials of this life; let all the calamities of the world befall them; visit them with the most painful illnesses. There are their heads; hast Thou no heaviness, pain, or toothache for them? There are their eyes; hast Thou no sores or swelling for them? There are their ears; hast Thou no deafness for them? There are their faces; hast Thou no cancer or ulcer to deform them? There are their hands and feet; canst

[1] Ut non vos tenebræ comprehendant.—John xii. 35.

[2] Volo Pater misericordiarum irascaris mihi; sed illa ira, qua corrigis devium, non qua extrudis de via.

Thou not send them some suffering? Their hearts; canst Thou not visit them with trouble and sadness? Their whole bodies; hast Thou no pains or afflictions for them; no hunger or thirst? There are their consciences; canst Thou not send a worm to gnaw at them, and torment them day and night, until they are compelled to return to Thee? All these things they will suffer rather than that terrible blindness! O Lord, save them from that! Perhaps, my dear brethren, you will again be shocked at my prayer, and think it a despairing one? But it is not so; it is a prayer that every one may join with me in sending up to heaven. For all the chastisements I have enumerated would be far better and more salutary for us, than that we should by repeated sins at length fall into hardness of heart, which is the greatest evil of all.

Resolution to avoid all sin.

But we must try to deserve neither one punishment nor the other, and now, while it is still time, throw ourselves on our knees before our good God with contrite hearts, and say to Him: O God of mercy, Thou hast here before Thee one who has often despised Thee and committed sin after sin. Ah, I detest my sins and repent with my whole heart of having ever offended Thee! How many there are who, although their sins are less numerous than mine, are now in a state of blindness, or are actually in hell! I thank Thee that Thou hast allowed my conscience to torment me, and hast not withdrawn Thy light from me. O my God, I will sin no more: not another sin shall I commit! I offer myself completely to Thee, with all I have that is pleasing to me on earth; I submit willingly to Thy fatherly chastisements. Punish me according to Thy good pleasure with Thy dear children, by all imaginable crosses; helped by Thy grace I will bear them all in patience and humility for Thy sake. But one thing I beg of Thee with Thy faithful servant David, "Enlighten my eyes, that I may never sleep in death;"[1] that my mind may never be perverted. Preserve and increase in me Thy supernatural light, that I may always walk in the way of Thy commandments; turn the eyes of my mind to Thee and to heaven, that after this life I may come to the full enjoyment of Thy light in a happy eternity. Amen.

[1] Illumina oculos meos ne unquam abdormiam in morte.—Ps. xii. 4.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.

Text.

Nunc autem abscondita sunt ab oculis tuis.—Luke xix. 42.
"But now they are hidden from thy eyes."

Alas! unhappy city of Jerusalem, has it come to this with thee at last, that thy enemies shall surround thee, and beat thee flat to the ground, and not leave in thee a stone upon a stone? But that is the least of the evils in store for thee; that was not the reason why the Son of God wept through pity when He saw thee. Oh! "if thou also hadst known," and received the light that shone so brilliantly for thee in the days of thy visitation; it would still be well with the souls that are in thee. But since thou hast refused this light, thy condition is desperate: "Now they are hidden from thy eyes;" and will always remain so. Thou wilt die and be eternally lost in thy blindness! This was that most terrible punishment inflicted on the obdurate Jews, which drew tears from the eyes of Jesus Christ. I have already treated, my dear brethren, etc.,—*continues as above.*

ON THE MOTIVES THAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE SINNER TO DO SPEEDY PENANCE.

ELEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE GOODNESS WITH WHICH GOD PROTECTS THE SINNER ON ACCOUNT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

God is always the Patron and Protector of sinners; and for that very reason they should at once be converted and do penance.—*Preached on the feast of St. Matthew, Apostle.*

Text.

Euntes autem discite quid est: Misericordiam volo.—Matt. ix. 13.

"Go then and learn what this meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

Introduction.

Therefore sinners can find no better Protector than Jesus Christ their meekest Saviour. You may murmur and find fault, you envious Pharisees, as long as you please, Jesus will still receive repentant sinners; nay, He will defend and protect them, and rejoice with the whole court of heaven at the conversion of a single one of them. Seeing Him sitting at table with public sinners, you complain, and say to His disciples: "Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?" But He answers and says: "They that are in health need not a physician, but they that are ill. Go then and learn what this meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice. For I am not come to call the just, but sinners." Be of good heart then, O sinners! We have still the same merciful God in heaven, who is ready at

any moment to receive you to His friendship. If you only come to Him with penitent hearts, He will be as He was before, your Patron and Protector. Nay, He has protected you while you were actually in the state of sin, that you might be enabled to do penance. To-day, my dear brethren, I will speak of this wonderful goodness of God in protecting sinners, a goodness that is enough to move a heart of stone; and I will speak of it partly to console those who have already done penance, and partly to encourage those who are in the state of sin, to be converted at once. I say therefore:

Plan of Discourse.

God is always the Patron and Protector of sinners; and for that very reason they should at once be converted and do penance. Such is the whole subject of the present sermon, or rather meditation.

Most merciful God, who art so good to sinners, touch with Thy powerful grace the hearts of all sinners, that the meditation on this Thy mercy may make them surrender to Thee at once. Help us herein by thy intercession, O Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, holy guardian angels.

No man would bear from his equal the insults that God bears with from man.

With reason does the Prophet David say, when meditating on the goodness and patient mercy of God: "It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man; it is good to trust in the Lord, rather than to trust in princes."[1] Far better is it to put one's trust in the great King of heaven, than in all the potentates of earth. And certainly, if the sinner had to do with a man like himself, and had offended him a twentieth part as much as he has offended the great God, he might well despair of being forgiven or being again received into the friendship of the offended person, nay, he might cry out with the fratricide Cain, "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon."[2] At all events, he would have little good to hope from the man whom he offended. So touchy and sensitive are we at the smallest offence; and even the lowliest and poorest are not an exception to this rule. Every one is on the defensive, as best he may, against him who tries to injure him; and satisfaction for an injury is sought at once, either by punishing the offending party, or, if that cannot be done in reality, at least by entertaining a desire for revenge.

[1] Bonum est confidere in Domino, quam confidere in homine: bonum est sperare in Domino, quam sperare in principibus.—Ps. cxvii. 8, 9.

[2] Major est iniquitas mea, quam ut veniam merear.—Gen. iv. 13.

But what a noise is made about it, if a subject is guilty of any grievous offence against his sovereign, even if he commits it through mere inadvertence, to say nothing of publicly ill-treating his king or prince by addressing him in abusive terms, or even striking him! In fact, it is impossible to imagine that any sensible man could act so outrageously; and if he were to do so, it would be considered the greatest folly in him to entertain the least hope of mercy and pardon, while it would be looked on as an impossibility for him ever to gain the favor of his offended sovereign. The wheel and gallows are not severe enough to punish the crime of which he is guilty. If a malefactor of the kind were flying from justice, and I were to meet him in his flight and to call out to him: Where are you going? Why are you in such a hurry? You need not be afraid; you may go at once to the king's palace, and into his private room, and in spite of what you have done to offend him, he will undertake to protect you; he will not allow the officers of the law to hurt you; he will defend you against all your accusers, and will treat you with the greatest kindness; what would you think of that, my dear brethren? The poor wretch would look on me as more of a fool than he is of a miscreant; and he would not lose a moment in listening to me, but would hurry off as fast as his legs could carry him. And, indeed, he would be perfectly in the right; if I were in his place I would do the same. For if I were guilty of such an offence against my sovereign, I could not hope that he would overlook it, much less that he would protect me, or honor me with his friendship. According to law he who intercedes for one who is guilty of a crime against the person of the sovereign is declared infamous. Nay, there was once a certain nobleman of high rank in France, who was imprisoned for twenty years, merely because he happened to relate in company that he had a dream in which it seemed to him that he killed the king. So sensitive are earthly potentates, that they cannot bear any one even to dream of injuring them.

Much less would a a king bear with such insults from one of his subjects.

"Exceedingly wonderful, O Lord, is Thy patience,"[1] says Oleaster with reason. What no king or prince would bear with from his subject, nor any private man from his equal, nor even one swineherd from another, that Thou bearest daily, with the greatest patience and with uninterrupted goodness, from sinners. All creatures are ready at every moment to act as the ministers of Thy justice, and to avenge on presumptuous sinners the

It is God alone who bears with and protects the sinner.

[1] O mirabilis valde est, Domine, patientia tua.

insults offered their Creator, as Thou Thyself sayest: "The whole world shall fight with him against the unwise."[1] The whole universe is ready to take up arms against foolish and wicked sinners; but Thou, O Lord, who alone art offended and insulted, Thou art the only One with whom wicked sinners can be sure of finding refuge, and to whom they can fly, even while they are in the state of sin, for defence and protection, and, if they only desire it, for full pardon for their crimes, and complete restoration to Thy grace and favor. Yes, O good God, such is really the case; and how often have I not found it so during my life! Thou, an infinitely great and mighty monarch, I, such a miserable worm of the earth! Thou hast not the least need of me and all my belongings, whilst I am in constant need of Thy help and support at all moments; and yet (ah, how fearful to think of it!) how have I dared to treat Thee! What fearful insults I have offered Thy divine Majesty, before whom the greatest princes of heaven tremble!

In spite of the insults the sinner offers Him.

As often as I committed a mortal sin, which was the case nearly every day for many years, in thought, word, and act, I despised Thy divine Majesty, and trampled Thy law under foot, and before Thy very eyes, while Thou wert actually looking at me, I have dared to say, I will not serve; I will not do as Thou commandest. Thou hast spoken to my conscience, and said, think, poor mortal, of what you are doing; if you carry out your present intention, I will disinherit you, blot your name out of the book of life, and close the gate of heaven against you. But I have given Thee an insolent answer by my rebellious will, and have dared to say to Thee that I do not want Thy heaven, and that I will act, think, and speak as I please. Thou hast gone still farther in order to deter me from sin. Woe to you, unhappy mortal! Thou hast said; if you despise Me in that way, I will condemn you to the flames of hell, which are ready to receive every wicked sinner, and there you will burn with the demons for all eternity. But, by my conduct at least, the only answer I gave Thee, was: I am not afraid of hell; I will commit this sin in spite of Thy threats, nor have I the least intention of abstaining from what I know to be displeasing to Thee. O my Lord and my God, is it possible that Thou hast borne with such conduct? Is it possible that Thou hast had patience with a vile wretch, who has thus dared to insult Thee, and whom Thou hast at any moment completely in Thy power, and that Thou hast

[1] Pugnabit pro illo orbis terrarum contra insensatos.—Sap. v. 21.

let him go without punishment? Is it possible that I am still alive, and am not really in hell? Yes, I still live, and, as I now hope with child-like confidence, I enjoy Thy favor and friendship; for Thou wilt never, during all eternity, remember all those insults I have offered Thee.

All creatures are ready to take vengeance on the sinner, but God protects him.

Alas! how often have not Thy creatures been ready to avenge the insults I offered Thy divine Majesty, while I was still in that unhappy state in which I declared myself Thy sworn enemy, and rebellious to Thy authority. How often has not the earth been on the point of opening beneath my feet, and swallowing me up! How often has not water longed to engulf me like another Jonas! How often did not the lightning attempt to strike me to earth! How often did not the heavens long to send down fire to consume me! How often has not the cruel demon waited eagerly for a sign from Thee, that he might hurry me off to hell! But Thou, O great God, who hast been so insulted by me, didst not allow Thy creatures to have their way; Thou hast protected me against them, and like a loving shepherd Thou hast run after me, Thy lost sheep, till Thou wert tired, and hast called out to me offering me Thy grace: Return . . . and I will receive thee."[1] And at last, after one or two sighs of repentance on my part, Thou hast taken me on Thy shoulders, and with the greatest joy and gladness, as if Thou hadst found some extraordinary treasure, hast brought me back to Thy own fold amongst Thy chosen flock, just as if I had never done anything to displease Thee and had always been Thy loving child; and Thou hast heaped on me countless benefits and graces. Most merciful God, what shall I think and say? What a monster I must be, if, after all this goodness on Thy part, I do not love Thee with my whole heart above all things! Nor am I the only one to whom Thou hast thus shown Thy mercy; Thou actest in a similar manner every day towards countless thousands of wicked sinners like myself. Alas, what terrible sins are committed every hour and moment, by day and by night, in every part of the world! What pride and vanity there are amongst people! What injustice and deceit! What drunkenness and intemperance! What quarrelling and contention! What fearful cursing, swearing, and blasphemy! What superstition and dealings with the devil! What profanation of churches and of days consecrated to God! What slander, calumny, and detraction! What disgraceful immorality is practised

[1] Revertere, et ego suscipiam te.—Jerem. iii. 1.

by people of all classes, married and single, in houses, in public places, in hidden corners, and even in the public streets! And there are many who go on committing sins of that kind from one Easter to the other, and they even increase their guilt by making bad confessions and Communions, since they never give the least sign of amendment; for he who makes no difficulty about committing one sin, will have no scruple in committing another, and thus sin is heaped on sin most recklessly. And Thou, O great God, art silent, while all these abominations are being perpetrated before Thy very eyes! But why do I say that Thou art silent? Thou protectest those miscreants, Thou bestowest Thy benefits on them; Thou defendest them, in the hope and expectation that they will at last enter into themselves, and do sincere penance, and be converted to Thee.

Even the saints would take vengeance on the sinner, if God did not prevent them.

If Thou wert to empower one of Thy holiest servants to pronounce sentence on sinners, and to carry it out: oh! woe to them, how miserably they would fare. And in truth, my dear brethren, the elect in heaven, although they are very anxious for our salvation, and pray constantly and desire with all their hearts that we may one day share in their endless joy, and praise God with them; yet they are enemies of sin, because it opposes, embitters, and angers God, whom they love above all things, and they would not have a moment's patience with it, nor refrain one second from taking up arms against the sinner, if such were the will of God; in order to avenge the insult offered to their Creator. Already in the very dawn of creation, when Lucifer with the countless host that followed him gave way to a proud thought and rebelled against God, St. Michael, the archangel, cried out at once, Who is like to God? Who will dare to oppose the Most High? And at once the rebel angels fell like a flash of lightning from heaven into the pit of hell. And what shall I say of those holy servants of God who are still on earth? Although, like all poor sinners, they are exposed to the imminent danger of sin from their own weakness, and therefore stand in need, like them, of the grace, patience, and mercy of God; although they are ready to spare no labor or trouble to gain souls; although they are adorned with many virtues and seem to be on fire with love of God and of their neighbor; yet they cannot bear wicked sinners, and, like the brother of the Prodigal Son, who, when he found that his scapegrace of a brother was received with open arms by his father, was so enraged that he refused to partake in the feast that was prepared for the occasion, they

complain almost to God of the too great patience He displays in bearing with sinners, and call on the divine justice to avenge the insults offered it. And woe to the world if the Almighty were always to hear their prayers and take vengeance on sinners! How often would it not have been utterly destroyed by sin and vice! We see examples enough of this in the Old and in the New Testaments.

We have an example of this in the Prophet Jonas.

Consider the example of the Prophet Jonas, how he sat alone in the desert, reduced to the verge of despair almost by anger and grief, as I have mentioned briefly on another occasion. "And Jonas was exceedingly troubled and was angry."[1] Why was he angry? Through zeal against sinners, and so to speak against God Himself, on acount of His goodness and mercy towards them. The Lord had commanded him to announce the inevitable destruction of Ninive within forty days. "He cried and said: Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed."[2] This fearful prophecy threw the Ninivites into the greatest consternation; full of sorrow and repentance for their sins, they put aside their magnificent apparel, clothed themselves with sackcloth, covered their heads with ashes, and fasted till evening with their children, sheep, and cattle, while nothing was to be heard throughout that vast city but cries to heaven for mercy and pardon. And behold, the good God, with whom alone the sinner who desires to repent is sure of finding refuge, moved by the penance and humiliations of the people, withdrew His threat, and commanded the avenging angel to sheathe the sword that was drawn to punish them. "And God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said, that He would do them, and He did it not."[3] Meanwhile Jonas was awaiting, in painful expectation, the fortieth day, which was to see the accomplishment of his prophecy; he looked up to heaven and down to the earth to see if there was any sign of the approaching calamity; the heavens, he thought, must open and rain down fire on the godless city, or the sea will inundate it, or the earth will open and swallow it up with its inhabitants. But none of these anticipations was verified. The heavens were serene as before; the sea remained within bounds; the earth showed no sign of disturbance; the fortieth day passed, and Ninive was still standing

[1] Afflictus est Jonas afflictione magna, et iratus est.—Jonas iv. 1.

[2] Clamavit et dixit: adhuc quadraginta dies, et Ninive subvertetur.—Ibid. iii. 4.

[3] Et misertus est Deus super malitiam, quam locutus fuerat, ut faceret eis, et non fecit.—Ibid. 10.

without having suffered any punishment. That was what Jonas in his zeal could not bear: "Jonas was exceedingly troubled and was angry." And he prayed to the Lord, and said: I beseech Thee, O Lord, is not this what I said, when I was yet in my own country."[1] Was I not right when I tried to escape from the duty of preaching? "Therefore I went before to flee into Tharsis; for I know that Thou art a gracious and merciful God, patient, and of such compassion, and easy to forgive evil,"[2] and that Thou canst not bear to punish sinners. Now, if I preach to the people of Thy goodness and mercy, they will only become worse, and if I threaten them with the severity of Thy justice, what better will matters be? For one or two tears of repentance are enough to satisfy and content Thee. Lord I am tired of life; "I beseech Thee, take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live;"[3] it is better for me to leave this world, than to be consumed with anger at the wickedness of men. But how does God, whom alone the Ninivites offended, act? See with what goodness and kindness He takes their part, while the angry Jonas is crying out for vengeance on them. "Dost thou think thou hast reason to be angry?"[4] said He. You are sorry because a worthless ivy was destroyed. "Thou art grieved for the ivy, for which thou hast not labored, nor made it to grow; which in one night came up, and in one night perished."[5] You are so sorry for it that you have become weary of life, and you say that the worm should have spared it, "and shall not I spare Ninive, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons, that know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left?"[6] and whom I have created for eternal happiness? Thus the Ninivites found with the God whom they had offended the grace and protection they would have sought in vain even from the holiest of men.

From the Prophet Isaias.

God had an almost similar dispute with His Prophet Isaias, as St. Jerome says, writing on the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaias. God called His servant to Him, as if to take counsel with him

[1] Et oravit ad Dominum, et dixit: obsecro Domine, numquid non hoc est verbum meum cum adhuc essem in terra mea?—Jonas iv. 2.

[2] Propter hoc præoccupavi ut fugerem in Tharsis; scio enim quia tu Deus clemens et misericors es, patiens, et multæ miserationis, et ignoscens super malitia.—Ibid. 2.

[3] Tolle, quæso, animam meam a me: quia melior est mihi mors quam vita.—Ibid. 3.

[4] Putasne bene irasceris tu?—Ibid. 9.

[5] Tu doles super hæderam, in qua non laborasti, neque fecisti ut cresceret, quæ sub una nocte nata est, et sub una nocte periit.—Ibid. 10.

[6] Et ego non parcam Ninive civitati magnæ, in qua sunt plus quam centum viginti millia hominum, qui nesciunt quid sit inter dexteram et sinistram suam.—Ibid. 11.

as to what was to be done in a certain case. See, He said, how the wicked people despise Me; they have nearly all fallen into idolatry and shamefully abandoned Me: what am I to do with them? I think I must still bear with them patiently and not exclude them from My goodness: "Let us have pity on the wicked."[1] What do you think of that? What? answers Isaias; have pity on them? Certainly not. Where, O Lord, is Thy justice? "Let Thy hand be exalted, and let them not see: let the envious people see and be confounded: and let fire devour Thy enemies."[2] Raise Thy almighty hand against them, and let the earth swallow them up. But God does not change His decision. "Let us have pity on the wicked," He says again. But, replies the zealous Prophet, "Thou hast done that before, and what has it profited Thee?" "Thou hast been favorable to the nation, O Lord, Thou hast been favorable to the nation; art Thou glorified?"[3] Thou hast been good to the people, and have they not become worse? Raise Thy hand, O Lord, and let them feel it, and learn to know Thee. Hear this, my dear brethren; the Prophet cries out for vengeance on sinners, and the patient and merciful God says: "Let us have pity on the wicked."

From Habacuc and David.

In the same way St. Jerome considers how the Prophet Habacuc complains to God of His excessive goodness: "Thy eyes are too pure too behold evil, and Thou canst not look on iniquity; why lookest Thou on them that do unjust things, and holdest Thy peace when the wicked devoureth the man that is more just than himself?"[4] His meaning was: Thy eyes, O Lord, are pure; Thy holiness is infinite; how canst Thou cast Thy pure eyes on the abominations of men? And Thou art silent, too, when beholding them! Sins are multiplied daily, and Thou holdest Thy peace! The wicked oppress the righteous, but Thou holdest Thy peace! Faith and justice are trampled on, and Thou sayest nothing! Pride, impurity, and intemperance are in the ascendant, and Thou lookest on in silence! Truly, the Prophet could not understand that. Even King David, the meekest man of his time, agrees with those other saints in this point, and often expresses a wish that God

[1] Misereamur impio.—Is. xxvi. 10.

[2] Exaltetur manus tua et non videant: videant et confundantur zelantes populi, et ignis hostes tuos devoret.—Ibid. 11.

[3] Indulsisti genti Domine, indulsisti genti: numquid glorificatus es?—Ibid. 15.

[4] Mundi sunt oculi tui ne videas malum, et respicere ad iniquitatem non poteris; quare respicis super iniqua agentes, et taces devorante impio justiorem se?—Habac. i. 13.

should moderate His goodness and mercy somewhat, lest His honor and glory should suffer loss. Hence he burst forth with the prayer, "Show forth Thy wonderful mercies;"[1] that is, as St. Augustine explains, make Thy mercy more rare, O Lord. Do not make it so common in the world, lest it become too cheap. Thou art so generous in showing it, that men do not value it, because it is so common. But woe to Thee, David, if God had heard thy prayer! What would have become of thee after thy grievous fall into sin?

From the Apostles of Christ.

And to go to the New Law, the Law of grace; how were men on the one side and God on the other disposed towards sinners? I am not surprised that the envious Scribes and Pharisees murmured against the public sinner, Magdalene, and that they wished to stone the woman taken in adultery; but both those sinners were protected by Our Lord, although they had not asked Him to protect them. Even the Apostles, who were so long in the school of the merciful Saviour, often called out for punishment on sinners. "Lord," cried out James and John, filled with indignation at a city of the Samaritans that had refused to receive them, "wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"[2] No, answered our patient Redeemer; that is not the way in which My heavenly Father acts with those who offend Him: "And turning He rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save."[3] "Lord," I hear Peter crying out in the Garden, filled with anger and indignation, and holding a drawn sword in his hand, when the godless Jewish rabble came foward to seize his divine Master, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"[4] And without waiting for an answer, he began at once to use his sword, and would not have ceased if the meek Saviour had not commanded him to put his sword back into the scabbard. Thus Christ actually defended those who had bound Him with chains and were about to drag Him away; nay, He returned them good for evil; for He miraculously healed the ear of the high-priest's servant, which had been cut off: "And when He had touched his ear He healed him."[5]

[1] Mirifica misericordias tuas.—Ps. xvi. 7.

[2] Domine, vis dicimus ut ignis descendat de cœlo et consumat illos?—Luke ix. 54.

[3] Et conversus increpavit illos, dicens: nescitis cujus spiritus estis. Filius hominis non venit animas perdere sed salvare.—Ibid. 55, 56.

[4] Domine, si percutimus in gladio?—Ibid. xxii. 49.

[5] Et cum tetigisset auriculam ejus, sanavit eum.—Ibid. 51.

"Father," He cried out in His death agony on the cross, while His murderers were mocking and jeering at Him, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[1] Oh, what excessive mercy on the part of our God! But, O Lord, dost Thou not see that all creatures are crying out for vengeance on Thy murderers, and yet Thou prayest for them? The sun withdraws its light from them; the heavens thunder and send down lightning to destroy them; the rocks are rent, and the earth, indignant at their impiety, opens to swallow them up; the very dead rise out of their graves to accuse the wretches before the judgment-seat of God; but Thou dost not seek to be avenged. Nay, Thou art the only one that defendest them against the wrath of Thy creatures! Thou defendest them against Thy heavenly Father, in whose hand Thou probably didst see the thunder bolt ready to strike them. Thou excusest their most inexcusable sin by alleging their ignorance, although it was a most gross ignorance. Father, forgive them, they do not quite understand what they are doing. And Thou wert praying then, not only for those who were actually putting Thee to death, but also for all future sinners!

Christ on the Cross prays for His murderers and all sinners.

Is it not the case, my dear brethren, that we ourselves sometimes feel annoyed when we hear of or see people leading reckless and un-Christian lives? We often look on it as an intolerable injustice that such wickedness should be so long allowed to remain unpunished. For my part, O my God, although I am in more need of Thy mercy than any one else, yet I must acknowledge that, if the matter depended on me, I should not have patience to bear with the many grievous sins that are daily committed against Thee. But in the words of Saul to David, I must confess that, "Thou art more just than I."[2] Thou, O Lord, art more gracious, meek, and merciful than I. Thou sayest to me by Thy Prophet Isaias, know, O men, that I am far different from you: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways My ways."[3] And, as Theodoret says, Thou meanest thereby, My way of acting is widely different from yours: you hate Me, and I love you: you fly from Me, and I run after you; you wage war against Me, and My only defence is to load you with benefits: you run daily on the road to hell, and My only idea is to bring you back on the road to heaven; you

We, too, find it hard to understand this patience and mercy on the part of God.

[1] Pater, dimitte illis, non enim sciunt quid faciunt.—Luke xxiii. 34.
[2] Justior tu es quam ego.—I. Kings xxiv. 18.
[3] Non enim cogitationes meæ, cogitationes vestræ: neque viæ vestræ, viæ meæ.—Is. lv. 8.

erect on earth prisons for evil-doers, and make wheels and gibbets to put them to death; the houses that I cause to be built for Me on earth are houses of reconciliation, and places of refuge for the wicked; My churches, altars, and confessionals are always open and ready to give refuge, pardon, and grace to sinners. O mercy! O goodness! I can say no more! That Thou, O great God, shouldst act so lovingly towards those who love Thee with their whole hearts; that Thou shouldst pour out Thy benefits on those who keep Thy commandments and try to do Thy will in all things, that I can understand; but that Thou shouldst be so good to the wicked, who despise Thee, mock at Thee, trample Thy law under foot, and often continue for years in the habit of sin, forgetting Thee altogether, O ye angels, that is what you may well be surprised at, that is what I cannot understand.

It is not to be expected from man.

Now I know what David meant when he sought to do good to some one of the house of Saul. "Is there any one left of the house of Saul," he asked, "that I may show the mercy of God unto him?"[1] Mark, my dear brethren, these words, "the mercy of God." Why does he use them? Did not David wish to be merciful to the descendants of his enemy? Yes. And why then did he not say, "my mercy," if so? But he was perfectly right in the words he used; for, generally speaking, our human mercy is shown only to those whom we love, or who do us good, or from whom we hope to receive benefits; while to do good to those who hate, persecute, and injure us requires the mercy of God. Yes, O Lord, Thou art the only One who showest such wonderful mercy even to Thy worst enemies, that Thou dost not allow Thyself to be wearied or overcome by any number of sins! Be Thou forever blessed, O God of infinite goodness! How can I return Thee adequate thanks for Thy great patience and astonishing mercy to sinners? If Thou hadst not borne with me, I should long since have been with the demons in hell.

This very mercy should make sinners repent at once.

Ah sinners, what a consolation it is for you and me to have to do with such a merciful God! But must not that very mercy move us at once to give up sin, to amend our lives, to return to Him by sincere repentance, and to love with all our hearts such a good God? "Despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and patience, and long suffering," cries out to us the holy Apostle

[1] Numquid superest aliquis de domo Saul, ut faciam cum eo misericordiam Dei.—II. Kings ix. 3.

St. Paul; "knowest thou not that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance."[1] Will you not at last see that the mercy of God should impel you to amend? If not, you are not human, but are as hard and insensible as stone and iron.

Shown by an example.

Rosweid writes of a certain hermit who was so long assailed by grievous temptations, that he was reduced to despair, left his solitude, and went back into Egypt to indulge freely in the pleasures of a worldly life. He soon became inflamed with love for the daughter of a heathen priest, and demanded her of her father in marriage. The priest consulted his idol about the matter. No, answered the devil, speaking by the mouth of the idol, you must not give your daughter to that man until he has abjured his God and renounced his baptism. The poor despairing man found this condition very hard to fulfil; but his foolish passion was so great, that he consented at last, and renounced his baptism, his God, and the saints, as the devil required of him. (O impure love, to what a degree of madness thou canst bring men!) The priest went back to his idol to announce the acceptance of the condition; but the evil spirit was not yet satisfied; you must not give him your daughter yet, he said, for although he has really abandoned and renounced his God, yet God has not renounced him; He still protects and defends him. When the hermit heard this, he came to his senses at once. Alas! miserable wretch that I am, he cried out with bitter tears, what do I hear? what have I done? Good God, is it possible? Miscreant that I am, I have completely abandoned Thee, and renounced Thy friendship forever! I have denied and abjured Thee, and still Thou hast not forsaken me! still Thou favorest me with Thy protection! O my heart, why dost thou not burst with grief and sorrow? "The good God helps me even now, although I have sinned so grievously; and He has not abandoned me. Why should I abandon Him?"[2] No, O merciful God, I will not leave Thee, but serve Thee faithfully for all eternity! Farewell to thee, O world, and to all thou hast! I will return to my solitude, and as long as I live will never cease deploring the grievous sin I have committed against such a loving and merciful God.

Conclusion and sorrow for sin.

O sinners! let those be our sentiments also; let us, too, weep hot tears for our sins, and make a resolution to avoid them in

[1] An divitias bonitatis ejus, et patientiæ, et longanimitatis contemnis? ignoras quoniam benignitas Dei ad pœnitentiam te adducit.—Rom. ii. 4.

[2] Bonus Dominus etiam malum nunc adjuvat me, et non recessit a me. Cur ego recedam ab eo.

future. How often and how grievously have I not offended my God? How often have I not renounced Him, if not in words, at least by my actions? And yet the good God has not abandoned me. He has protected me while I was actually in the state of sin, and has never ceased to heap benefits on me. Why, then, should I leave Him? No, O good God, never again shall I do so! This very moment I will return to Him whom I have so often and so faithlessly forsaken. Hitherto I have often thought of heaven and its endless joys, but they did not seem precious enough to me to induce me to forego forbidden pleasures. I have often heard in sermons of the eternal flames of hell; but they did not seem terrible enough to deter me from vice. Thy infinite Majesty, O God, has hitherto failed to inspire me with reverence for Thee and with horror for sin; for I have not hesitated to sin before Thy very eyes. But I cannot resist the wonderful goodness and mercy with which Thou hast borne with me, ungrateful as I have been. I surrender to Thee, O Lord! My heart is subdued! Behold, it is now full of sorrow. And what grieves me most, is that I have ever offended so good a God. This very day I will candidly confess all my sins, and will never cease to be sorry for them as long as I live. And I will love Thee more earnestly, and seek to fulfil Thy holy will in all things more exactly, the more I remember that I have treated Thee most unjustly, O good God. Such is the resolution to which, with Thy grace, I will always remain faithful. Amen.

The above sermon may be preached on the text: *murmurabant Pharisæi et Scribæ, dicentes; quia hic peccatores recipit.* Luke xv. 2. "And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners," taken from the third Sunday after Pentecost.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

Text.

Sinite utraque crescere usque ad messem.—Matt. xiii. 30.
"Suffer both to grow until the harvest."

The servants were anxious to root up the weeds at once, and to throw them into the fire; but the good man of the house, who was the only one to suffer loss on account of the weeds, said that they should be let alone to grow with the good wheat until the harvest time, and then they might be pulled up. In this

parable, my dear brethren, Christ represents the patience and long-suffering with which He endures sinners: for there is no doubt amongst the learned, that by the wheat are meant the just, and by the cockle, sinners. If creatures were allowed to work their will, they would at once say, like the servants in to-day's Gospel: "Wilt thou that we go and gather it up?" Give us permission, O Lord, to destroy the wicked off the face of the earth. But what does the merciful God answer? No, He says; be not too zealous: "Suffer both to grow until the harvest;" perhaps the wicked may still be converted and amend. This wonderful goodness of God, my dear brethren, etc.,—*continues as above.*

TWELFTH SERMON.

ON THE MERCY OF GOD IN BEARING PATIENTLY WITH AND RECEIVING SINNERS.

Subject.

The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, 1. while the latter is still in the state of sin, 2. when he wishes to leave the state of sin and to be converted.—*Preached on the first Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Estote ergo misericordes, sicut et Pater vester misericors est. Luke vi. 36.

"Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Introduction.

Mark these words, O sinners, and all you who have ever grievously offended God, and learn what a good and merciful Lord we have. Jesus Christ is not satisfied with merely showing His mercy publicly towards sinners, going after them everywhere and receiving them most lovingly into his friendship; but He also gives us as an example of mercy His heavenly Father, who makes His sun to shine on the good and the wicked, on the just and the unjust; and in fact, since the latter are more in need of pity and mercy, He shows special goodness to them by bearing with them so patiently while they are in the state of sin, and when He could at any moment hurl them into hell, and

by being ready to admit them into His love and friendship, if they do penance. This mercy, my dear brethren, which I have experienced hundreds of times, and therefore have so much cause to praise and bless unceasingly, will, I hope, to day be alone sufficient to win over your hearts and mine to God. What could not be done by the consideration of the uncertainty of life, the severity of God's judgments, and the eternal pains of hell, must and will eventually be effected by meditating on the merciful goodness of God; namely, sinners will be forced by a gentle violence to do sincere penance, and to avoid all sin in future. Teach us, therefore, O Lord, the wonders of Thy goodness and mercy to sinners! I will make known the thoughts with which Thou hast inspired me concerning them.

Plan of Discourse.

The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, while the latter is still in the state of sin; such will be the first part. The wonderful goodness and mercy of God towards the sinner, when the latter wishes to leave the state of sin and to be converted; such will be the second part.

Do Thou, O God, give us this day the grace and mercy, in case we are still in sin, to be moved by Thy wonderful mercy to conversion; and, in case we are already converted, to love Thee for the future above all things with our whole hearts. This we beg of Thee by the merits of Mary, the Mother of mercy, and through the intercession of the holy guardian angels.

Nothing is sweeter than revenge to one who has suffered injury.

Just as there is nothing sweeter or more agreeable to a healthy stomach than the food that is set before it, even if it consists only of a piece of dry bread; as there is nothing the thirsty man longs for so much as a draught of cold water; as one who loves always bears about in his heart and desire the object of his love; so, says the philosopher Aristotle, and experience confirms his words, there is nothing more pleasing to a passionate man, who has been grievously offended, than to give vent to his anger, and be revenged on his enemy. This is made evident by the secret joy that such a man experiences if he sees or hears that some evil has befallen the person who offended him; by his bitter envy and jealousy, if the other prospers; by his rage and resentment, if he cannot have satisfaction on him. Hence the world is struck with astonishment when it hears or reads that some one has forgiven his deadliest enemy, when he had him in his power and could have had full satisfaction from him. If one wishes to

excite admiration for king David, he is represented, not as slaying the giant Goliath, armed with nothing but his shepherd's staff and sling; not as killing with his own hand, while still a boy, the bear and the lion; but as allowing his sworn enemy Saul, who had inflicted countless injuries on him, and who was still pursuing him to take his life, to depart unharmed out of the cave without doing him the least harm, although he was completely in his power, a mode of action that compelled even Saul to shed tears. And such conduct is strange and almost incomprehensible to us; so that it is rare to find men who, if they are grievously offended and have a chance of avenging themselves, yet manage to conquer their anger and to forgive their enemy. Hardly to any purpose do preachers exhort people to forgive injuries; hardly to any purpose do they cry out till they are hoarse the words of Our Lord, "But I say to you: Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you."[1] Pardon those who have offended you, or else God will never pardon your sins; forgive, and that too from your hearts, or the fire of hell awaits you; you must necessarily choose one or the other. It is in vain, I say, to exhort people to practise the duty of forgiveness; for, generally speaking, they will remain as they were before. When anger and hatred have once taken possession of the heart, all the exhortations in the world will not prevent a man from being revenged when he can. So difficult it is for one of a passionate disposition to forgive his enemy, not to speak of loving and doing him good; so sweet and pleasant it is to be revenged.

God is most grossly insulted by the sinner.

O my Lord and my God, if Thou wert like men in this particular; if Thou, too, wert unwilling to restrain Thy hatred and anger; if Thou wert determined to take revenge on Thy enemy every time he offends Thee: oh, woe to me! where should I be now? Not here certainly; but long ago I should have been with the demons in the flames of hell! How would it now be with many of you, O sinners? Let us think a little of the past and of the state in which we are at present. How have we acted towards God, and how has God acted towards us? What injury has He ever done us? Is there any one who can point to the least thing that God has done to harm him? Nay, is there any one who can prove that God has not been constantly doing good to him every moment of his life? Therefore, in justice, there should

[1] Ego autem dico vobis: diligite inimicos vestros: benefacite his qui oderunt vos. — Matt. v. 44.

not be a moment of our lives during which we do not behave towards God with the greatest gratitude, reverence, fear, and love. But how have we acted towards Him in reality? Have we not dared, miserable creatures that we are, who are every moment in need of our God, have we not dared to rebel against Him without the least cause? How often have we not renounced His friendship, and declared war against Him; reviled and insulted Him to His face by our actions; despised, mocked, and laughed at Him; trampled on what we knew to be the expression of His will, and turned our backs on Him, thus showing Him that we cared little about Him? That is really what we have done every time we committed a mortal sin. That is what is still done every day by most men, by all kinds of injustice, by wilful drunkenness, impurity, cursing and swearing, calumny and detraction, in thought, word, and deed. For sin is nothing else than a rebellion against God, a contemning, dishonoring, insulting God; because man refuses to do what God wishes him to do, or does that which he knows to be displeasing to God. And what revenge has God, who is thus first insulted by us, what revenge has He taken, up to the present? "I have sinned," I might well say in the words of the Wise Ecclesiasticus, but with wonder at Thy patience, O Lord, and with most humble thankfulness for Thy goodness: "I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?"[1] In spite of having so wantonly offended Thee, I have as yet felt no punishment.

And He is very angry with the sinner.

And is it because the great Lord does not feel the insults His weak and miserable creatures offer Him; just as a brave man does not mind the barking of a little lap-dog? Ah, indeed, He does feel them! He speaks Himself in the Sacred Scripture of the great sorrow and anguish caused Him by sinners transgressing His commands, and of the disgust, hatred, and anger He feels towards the sinner. "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike,"[2] He says in the Book of Wisdom. "Neither shall the wicked dwell near Thee; nor shall the unjust abide before Thy eyes. Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity."[3] The same David speaks of the anger and disgust that God has of sin: "Shall Thy anger burn like fire?"[4] And St. Paul also, when he says, "But according to thy hardness and impenitent

[1] Peccavi, et quid mihi accidit triste?—Eccius. v. 4.

[2] Similiter autem odio sunt Deo impius et impietas ejus.—Wisd. xiv. 9.

[3] Neque habitabit juxta te malignus, neque permanebunt injusti ante oculos tuos. Odist omnes qui operantur iniquitatem.—Ps. v. 6, 7.

[4] Exardescet sicut ignis ira tua?—Ibid. lxxxviii. 47

heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath."[1] To show the sorrow and grief He feels at sin, God Himself uses an expression which, strictly speaking, could be employed by man only: "And God, seeing that the wickedness of men was great on earth. . . touched inwardly with sorrow of heart, He said: I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. . . for it repenteth me that I have made them,"[2] since they now despise and offend Me. See what terrible vengeance God took on His own, innocent, Incarnate Son, when He allowed Him, after suffering unheard-of torments, to be nailed to an infamous gibbet, and that, too, for the sins of others, which He had undertaken to satisfy for. "For the wickedness of My people have I struck Him,"[3] says His heavenly Father. Hear what the reprobate in hell have to say about it, who, although they were redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, will have to suffer endless torments in that lake of fire, while the just, and good, and merciful God will look on, and will hear their howls of despair, without being in the least moved to mercy or pity; nay, He will laugh at their sufferings and take a special pleasure in them. "I will laugh in your destruction,"[4] He says. Therefore God must feel most grievously hurt by sin, and His anger against sinners must be very bitter. Because, the more He must love Himself above all things, as the Supreme Good, the more also He must hate and abominate sin, which is opposed to Him, as the worst of all evils; so that no man can cause another such grief and vexation, or offer Him such an injury, as the sinner causes and offers to God by violating His commands deliberately; nor can any man have such hatred or anger against his bitterest enemy, as God has against the sinner. A soul in the state of mortal sin is in the sight of God such an abominable object, that a dead and putrid dog (such is the simile used by St. Augustine) causes less disgust to the most delicate nostrils, than such a soul causes to its God.[5]

And can punish him at once, if He pleases.

But, my Lord and my God, what am I to conclude from this? Why dost Thou not pour out the vials of Thy wrath? Why dost Thou not let sinners feel Thy anger? Hast Thou perhaps

[1] Secundum autem duritiam tuam et impenitens cor thesaurizas tibi iram in die irae.—Rom. ii. 5.

[2] Videns autem Deus quod multa malitia hominum esset in terra. . . tactus dolore cordis intrinsecus, delebo, inquit, hominem, quem creavi, a facie terrae . . . poenitet enim me fecisse eos.—Gen. vi. 5, 6, 7.

[3] Propter scelus populi mei percussi eum.—Is. liii. 8.

[4] Ego in interitu vestro ridebo.—Prov. i. 26.

[5] Tam tolerabilius canis putridus fœtet hominibus, quam anima peccatrix Deo.

not opportunities, or means, or strength enough to revenge Thyself on Thy enemy? Is not man at all times, and in every place, even when he is actually committing sin and treating Thee so unjustly, completely in Thy power, so that Thou canst do with him as Thou pleasest? Dost Thou not hold him in Thy hands? Only give a sign to the clouds, and they will send down their lightnings on the head of the presumptuous wretch who dares to offend Thee; give a sign to the earth, and it will open and swallow him up; let the demons loose for a moment, and they will hurry him off to hell; withdraw from him for a single instant Thy own protecting hand, and he will at once fall back into his original nothingness. If Thou art so enraged against sinners, why dost Thou do none of those things?

Yet He refrains from punishing, and patiently awaits the sinner.

Ah, there is where we see the wonderful love, patience, meekness goodness, and mercy with which God treats the sinner, inasmuch as he overcomes, so to speak, such an intense dislike, restrains such hatred and anger, and, although He has nothing good to hope from the sinner, and no harm to fear from him, yet he does not take the least revenge, when it is so easy for Him to take it; but with the greatest patience bears with his wanton offences and transgressions, and allows Himself to be insulted and annoyed, year after year, by daily sins, without doing the least thing to harm him, preserving him in life all the time. St. John Chrysostom makes some beautiful reflections on this mercy of God. See, he says, when a man wishes to build a house, what a long time it takes him to finish it from the foundation. How many tradesmen, laborers, masons, and carpenters have to work at it. Whole years may pass before it is in a fit state to be dwelt in. But if a house is to be thrown down, only a few days are required; a spark of fire is enough to destroy a palace, or to reduce this cathedral to ashes, unless measures are successfully taken to prevent the flames from spreading. It is quite the opposite with the works of God; the Almighty Lord builds up very quickly, but He is very slow in tearing down. In the beginning He formed the intention of creating this mighty world; how long did it take Him? He simply said, "*fiat*," let it be done, and it was finished. The earth was there, millions of stars shone in the firmament, the immense ocean was filled with fishes, the air with birds, the land with animals.

As He did formerly, when He wished to

But when the same God was forced to destroy the wicked world by the universal Deluge, on account of its sins, it took Him a hundred and twenty years to complete His vengeance. For

the whole of that time beforehand He gave notice to men of the calamity that was impending over them; He sent to them the Patriarch Noe to exhort them to amend their sinful lives, and to tell them that, if they continued in their sins, punishment was to be inflicted on them by an angry God; but if they abstained from sin, that they might appease His anger. When Noe saw that his exhortations were fruitless, he began to build the ark; and what a long time it took him by divine command to finish it? He spent fully a hundred years at it, although he might have finished it much quicker, if he had employed more workmen to help him. Why was this? In order that men, seeing that the threat was meant in earnest, might have time to amend, and to do penance for their sins. "They waited for the patience of God," says St. Peter, "in the days of Noe, when the ark was a-building."[1] And God waited patiently; it seemed hard to Him to destroy men, although they were His greatest enemies; just as a loving mother is unwilling to punish her dear child. At last the day appointed for the fulfilment of the threat arrived, and the clouds poured down torrents of water; but in what manner? They certainly could have overwhelmed the world at once; but even while inflicting punishment, the good God could not forget His mercy. The rain fell steadily for forty days, and the waters rose gradually until they entered the houses and finally outtopped the mountains. Why was that? asks St. John Chrysostom. Because the patience of God was waiting that men might have time, while climbing higher and higher to get out of the reach of the waters, to repent of their sins, and at all events to save their souls from the eternal flames of hell, as doubtless many succeeded in doing.

destroy the wicked world.

It is just the same to-day with me and you, O sinners! The good God is very quick in pardoning, and forgiving, and admitting us to His friendship; but He is very slow in inflicting on us the punishment we so well deserve, no matter what provocation we give Him. He waits from one day to another, from one month to another, from one year to another, nay, sometimes till old age creeps on us; and during the whole time He gives way to us as if we had done nothing whatever to displease Him. He exhorts, threatens, promises, runs after us, and calls out to us to return to Him. "What if God," says St. Paul, and we know by experience the truth of his words, "willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much

And as He acts with man nowadays also.

[1] Expectabant Dei patientiam in diebus Noe, cum fabricaretur arca.—I. Pet. iii. 20.

patience vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction."[1] As if he had forgotten His omnipotence when He wished to be revenged on His enemies; as if He did not see our sins, and knew nothing about them. "Thou hast mercy on all," says the Wise Man of Him, "because Thou canst do all things, and winkest at the sins of men for the sake of repentance."[2] Thou actest, O Lord, as if sin did not affect Thee, because, as Thou Thyself affirmest with an oath, Thou desirest not the death of the sinner, and this Thou sayest by Thy Prophet Ezechiel in order to give the sinner courage to do penance. "Say to them: As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live;"[3] as if his damnation would cause Thee some great loss; and Thou callest after him: "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; and why will you die?"[4]

The presumption of the sinner and the goodness of God to him shown by a simile.

Oh! when I consider on the one hand the great presumption of the sinner in daring to rebel against God, and on the other hand the wonderful patience and mercy with which Gods acts towards him, I imagine I see a little child in the arms of its mother. The child has not yet come to the use of reason, but, small as it is, it has its fits of bad temper, and sometimes, when things are not to its liking, it can be very obstinate indeed; it kicks and struggles, and tries its best to get free from its mother's arms; it even gnashes its teeth against her, and actually raises its hand to strike her, so angry is it in its weakness, at not getting what it wishes. And what does the mother do? Does she beat it? Sometimes, indeed, that would be a very good thing to do; but it is not generally done. Ah no! she presses the child to her heart all the closer, talks to it in a loving manner, and sings for it and soothes it, until it is quite satisfied. That is the only punishment she inflicts on her obstinate child. There you have a striking example of the presumption of the sinner, and at the same time of the goodness and mercy of God towards him. Man, when arrived at the age of reason, knows well that he is held in the arms, in the very lap of God, whose presence he can never avoid, and yet he dares to vent his anger against God, to revile Him, to despise Him, and, as it were, to raise his hand to strike Him in the face (for all the buffets that Christ, the Son of

[1] Quodsi Deus volens ostendere iram, et notam facere potentiam suam, sustinuit in multa patientia vasa irae, apta in interitum.—Rom. ix. 22.

[2] Misereris omnium, quia omnia potes, et dissimulas peccata hominum propter pœnitentiam.—Wisd. xi. 24.

[3] Dic ad eos: vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus: nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

[4] Convertimini, convertimini a viis vestris pessimis; et quare moriemini?—Ibid.

God, received from the Jews and the soldiers did not cause Him half so much pain and anguish as a single mortal sin, which offends Himself and His heavenly Father); and this undutiful conduct he persists in often for years and years. Meanwhile, how does God act towards him? Not otherwise than the loving mother or nurse acts towards the child; as He says Himself by the Prophet Osee: "And I was like a foster-father to Ephraim, I carried them in my arms: and they knew not that I healed them."[1] He holds him all the closer in His arms, that he may not die in the state of sin and fall into the jaws of the hellish wolf; He continues to bestow His benefits on him as before; He gives him the light of the sun; He warms him with fire, covers him with clothing, and gives him food and drink every day; for all these things must come from the hands of God. "Who," asks St. Lawrence Justinian in astonishment, "who can count the benefits that God bestows every day on ungrateful sinners?"[2] See how He commands all His creatures to serve and preserve them: see how He allures them by kindness;"[3] how He heaps benefits on them;"[4] how He calls to them by His promises and exhortations;"[5] how, with the greatest patience and overlooking their sins, He tries to bring them back to the right way;"[6] and how with the most loving caresses He tries to draw them to Himself."[7]

This wonderful goodness and mercy should move the sinner to do penance at once.

Oh, wonderful certainly is God in His goodness and mercy to the miserable and wretched creature who has offended and angered Him. Reflect on this, O sinner! If the little child, in the midst of its impotent struggles against its mother, were suddenly to come to the use of reason, what would be its sentiments when the fit of passion passes away? Would it not be filled with dismay and terror at its own insolence and presumption in having dared to raise its hand against her in whose arms it was carried, and who need only have taken away the support of her arms, when it would have at once fallen on the ground and, perhaps, broken its neck? Would it not be astonished at the meekness and goodness of its mother, in thus allowing it to beat her and struggle against her, without ceasing to show it the greatest love and tenderness? With what sorrow would it not beg pardon, and how sincere would not its love be

[1] Ego quasi nutricius Ephraim, portabam eos in brachiis meis: et nescierunt quod curarem eos.—Osee xi. 3.

[2] Quis verbis explicet quanta quotidie ingratis peccatoribus Deus beneficia conferat?

[3] Illos blanditiis allicit. [4] Muneribus onerat. [5] Exhortationibus vocat.

[6] Revocat indulgentia. [7] Charitate trahit.

in future for so good a mother? Ah sinner! why do you not do so now? Why are you not moved by the patience with which the good and merciful God has waited for you so long? You should consider the matter deeply, and often say to yourselves: God could many a time have hurled me into hell; and He has not done so, but, on the contrary, has conferred on me countless benefits. Let that thought cause you to shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and say, like King Saul, when David spared his life in the cave: "Thou art more just than I."[1] I, O Lord, have insulted Thee, and Thou hast done good to me. I have fought against Thee to the utmost of my power, and tried almost to compel Thee to chastise me; and Thou hast spared me, and, like a mother, carried me in Thy arms. For that very reason I now detest my past insolence and presumption, and am resolved to return to Thee by sincere repentance. Courage then; delay no longer! You cannot do anything more pleasing to your heavenly Father than to fly at once to the lap of His mercy; and nothing will give Him greater pleasure than to receive and forgive you from His heart. How will He forgive you? Here again we have to admire the goodness and mercy of God to the sinner who does penance; as we shall briefly consider in the

Second Part.

It takes a great deal of care and trouble to obtain forgiveness of one whom we have offended.

If he who has offended another wishes to be re-admitted to his favor and friendship, what must he do, especially when the offended person is a mighty lord? Must he at once run to his house, acknowledge his guilt, and beg pardon? Certainly not; that would be a foolish thing to do; it would be only throwing oil on the flames. How could he expect the offended lord to give him a good reception, if he rushes into the house uninvited, although his only intention is to ask forgiveness? His conduct would be considered a fresh insult, that would inflame the other's anger anew, and perhaps make him receive the intruder at the point of the sword. The first question would be, who has asked you to come here? How can you dare to appear in my sight? Or, at all events, he need not expect a kind reception, and must not be surprised if the person he has offended turns his back on him, tells him in cold and scornful words to come another time, and at last consents to speak of forgiveness only when ample satisfaction has been offered for the insult. No; a

[1] Justior tu es quam ego.—I. Kings xxiv. 18.

matter of the kind must be dealt with much more carefully. The offender must employ the good offices of a third person to act as his advocate, and say a good word for him. And the advocate, too, has to be on his guard; it will not do for him to blurt out the matter at once; he must wait for a favorable opportunity, when the other is in good humor, and not even dare to say a word of the insult suffered until he has with great caution asked and obtained permission. Then he might say that the poor man (for he dare not as yet mention his name, unless he is expressly asked to do so) is in such trouble on account of having incurred displeasure, that he is very sorry for his conduct, and is ready to do anything at all by way of satisfaction; and would there be any objection to his sending an apology? and so on. So much trouble is required, so many plans have to be considered, and so much time spent, before one succeeds in being reconciled to the person whom he has offended. And if the means used are successful, and the reconciliation effected, there still remain often a secret dislike and mistrust in the heart of the offended person, and the insult suffered is never forgotten, so that there is no chance of true friendship ever existing between the parties again.

The sinner needs only a moment of repentance, and God forgives him at once.

Ah! how different the Almighty and Sovereign Lord is to us in this respect. If I have made God my enemy; if I have fallen into disgrace with Him; if I have grievously offended Him a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times; if I have wantonly insulted Him for ten, twenty, thirty, or forty years; how much time will it take to appease His anger, and be reconciled to Him? It would be but right and just that, as I have allowed Him to knock, sigh, and call out so often at the door of my heart, without deigning to give Him a hearing, and have turned Him away like a troublesome beggar; it would be only right that He, mindful of the way in which I have treated Him, should in turn allow me to knock and sigh without giving me an answer. But no; a single moment is all the time I require to be reconciled to Him; whatever moment suits me, if I am only in earnest, I will be always sure to find Him in a good humor, and ready, nay, anxious to forgive me and to offer me His grace and friendship. He Himself has promised by His Prophet Ezechiel, that, at whatever time the sinner is converted, he will live, and his former iniquities will no longer be remembered. And how am I to present myself before Him? Oh, there is no need of a third person's interference now to dispose His heart to

listen to me; I need not seek for some one to present Him with an apology in my name! If I only wish, I myself can go directly to Him, although He is embittered against me; I can present myself before Him, and ask His pardon. What must I do to receive it? I have only to acknowledge my sins with true sorrow in confession; and if I have no opportunity of confession, a single penitent sigh, one heartfelt word of sorrow, "I have sinned, O Lord, and I am sorrow for it; I will never sin again;" that is quite enough to reconcile us thoroughly, and to blot out a thousand million sins, if I had committed them. I am again a friend of God, His beloved child, and a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. I am again admitted to grace, without bail or surety for my future conduct, although I have broken my word already a hundred times, and have abandoned Him after He has forgiven me. I am received by Him without any fear on my part that He will keep up against me the remembrance of my former wickedness, or that He will be less friendly to me on account of it, nay, with the assurance that He will not remember my sins any more.

And receives him with the greatest joy.

God receives me into His friendship, and that, too, with so much love and joy, that it seems as if He looked on it as a great happiness to be able to forgive me, and a greater one than I consider it to receive His forgiveness; so that it would be almost a new sin for me not to repent of my sins at once, in order to procure Him that happiness. Time does not allow me, my dear brethren, to illustrate this truth by some of the many examples of which the Holy Scripture is full. With what loving kindness did He not act towards the sinners Zachæus and Matthew, towards the woman taken in adultery, the Samaritan woman, the notorious sinner Magdalene, the penitent thief, Peter, who denied Him thrice, and Thomas, who had lost faith in Him? To none of these did He make the least reproach on account of the grievous sins they had committed; He never upbraided them with their vices; He treated them with the greatest friendship, ate and drank with them publicly, and defended them against detractors, as if He Himself were attacked in their persons, so that He got the name of being a protector, receiver, friend, and harborer of sinners.

As appears from the Gospel parables.

If you wish to see what joy it gives the Almighty God to admit the repentant sinner to His friendship, read and meditate on the parable of the Good Shepherd, who leaves His whole flock to go in search of the one sheep that has gone astray. How He

seeks it over mountain and valley, and, when He has found it, brings it back on His shoulders rejoicing, and prepares a feast for His neighbors, that they may rejoice with Him. "Rejoice with Me," He says to them, "because I have found My sheep that was lost."[1] Read the parable of the Prodigal Son, to whose father God compares Himself: this undutiful son, after having squandered his whole patrimony in gluttony, drunkenness, and riotous living, and disgraced his father, came back half naked and starving, in the hope that his father would hire him as a servant. The father saw him coming afar off, and was not satisfied with merely admitting him into his house, which certainly would have been more honor than he deserved, but ran out to meet him, as if he were a great lord, and before asking what he wanted, fell on his neck and kissed him with tears of joy, sent all the servants hurrying about to get him new clothes, a ring for his finger, and shoes for his feet, and had a grand banquet prepared to testify to the joy he felt at having his son back again. "Let us eat and make merry," he said, "because this my son was dead, and is come to life again; was lost and is found."[2] The other son, who had always remained faithful to his father, never had any such rejoicings made over him; a fact of which he complained bitterly. "So I say to you," says Christ, "there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance."[3] St. Thomas makes a wonderful remark on this in admirable words: "God calls the angels together to rejoice, not with men, but with Himself, when a sinner does penance; as if man were the god of his God; as if the whole happiness of God consisted in finding the man whom He had lost, and as if God could not be happy without man."[4]

Conclusion and repentance for having offended such a merciful God.

O sinner! how long will you refuse to give this great consolation and joy to the God who loves you so much? Have you not abused His patience long enough? Can you be so cruel as to offend Him still more, and to treat Him so shamefully? He is no Christian, but a heathen, a barbarian without religion (I am not saying half enough); he is an unreasoning wild beast, a monster; help me, my dear brethren, with your thoughts, to say

[1] Congratulamini mihi, quia inveni ovem meam, quæ perierat.—Luke xv. 6.

[2] Manducemus et epulemur: quia hic filius meus mortuus erat, et revixit; perierat et inventus est.—Ibid. 23, 24.

[3] Ita dico vobis, gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente.—Ibid. 10.

[4] Omnes angelos convocat ad congratulandum, non homini, sed sibi; quasi homo Dei deus esset, et tota salus divina in ipsius inventione penderet, et quasi sine ipso beatus esse non posset.—St. Thom opusc. lxiii., c. 7.

what he must be, who is not touched by the wonderful patience and goodness of God; who is not moved by it to repent of his sins at once, and who, instead of loving such a good Lord with all his heart, actually offends Him anew! O my God, after all, what a severe revenge Thou takest on me; for Thou makest me ashamed of myself, and intolerable in my own eyes, when Thou remindest me of Thy loving mercy, when I think of the patience with which Thou hast borne with me so long while I was in the state of sin, when I recall to mind how I was wearied on the way of evil, and yet I could not exhaust Thy patience; how, after my many infidelities, Thou didst not take any revenge on me; how Thou didst confer innumerable benefits on me, Thy enemy; how Thou hast so often received me again and with joy into Thy friendship, never reproaching me with my former sins, and how Thou art willing henceforth to place me in the number of Thy beloved children. This mercy, I repeat, puts me to greater confusion than any revenge Thou couldst take on me, bitter death, strict judgment, fire and torments of hell, uncertain and long eternity, and anything else that can terrify me. I do not want you to impel me to do penance, and to abstain from sin in future! There is nothing more intolerable to me than to think that I have ever offended and despised so good a God; nothing more terrible than the thought of again offending Him. Take, O Lord, Thy heaven and all its promised joys away, and everything that could entice me to serve Thee; this incomprehensible mercy of Thine, which I have so often experienced, is quite powerful enough of itself to captivate my heart, even against my wicked and obstinate nature, and to draw it altogether to Thy love! O God of patience, how could I treat Thee so unjustly and offend Thee! I am sorry a thousand times for all my sins. "Be merciful," I say with St. Bernard, "to the miserable penitent, whom Thou hast spared so long when he was a sinner."[1] From this moment I am firmly resolved (mark, O holy guardian angel, what I am about to say, and write down the date and place in which I make this resolution!), not half-and-half, as hitherto, but with all the power of my heart, never more, O God, to offend Thee even by venial sin, wilfully and deliberately; but to love Thee constantly above all things, until, as I firmly hope from Thy great mercy, I shall one day in heaven be a living and ever grateful witness to Thy wonderful love and mercy to sinners. Amen.

[1] Da misericordiam misero et pœnitenti, cui tamdiu pepercisti peccatori.

THIRTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE TRIALS WITH WHICH GOD VISITS THE SINNER.

Subject.

God visits the sinner with trials, that he may repent and amend; and woe to the sinner who has no trials to suffer!—*Preached on the feast of the Dedication of a church.*

Text.

Venit enim Filius hominis quærere et salvum facere quod perierat.—Luke xix. 10.

"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Introduction.

Such was the end that Jesus Christ Our Saviour had in view, when he came into this world: "to seek and to save that which was lost." This was His only occupation as long as He lived on earth; to this were directed all His toil and labor, His watching and prayer, His hunger and thirst, His wanderings hither and thither, His eating and drinking with sinners, His preaching and miracles, His sufferings and death; everything He did was to bring eternal happiness to men, whom sin was bringing to eternal ruin. God has still the same will and intention with regard to us; as far as lies with Him, He desires the salvation of all men. To carry out His wishes He makes use of different means, according to the dispositions and characters of men; some who hear his voice, He tries to allure to Himself by kindness and friendliness, as He formerly did with Zachæus; others He calls by different crosses and trials, thus using a sort of violence with them, so as to make this life uncomfortable to them; and that is the experience of most sinners in the world. This last means is certainly very bitter to our sensuality, and we often think that God is ungracious and unmerciful to us, when He visits us with trials; yet the intention that God has in so doing is none other than to bring our souls thereby to eternal happiness. God visits with trials sinners who are still in the state of sin; He visits with trials the just who have done penance for their sins; He visits with trials the innocent who have never sinned; He visits with trials even those saintly souls that

lead holy lives. The first, that they may be converted to Him, and amend their lives; the second, that they may suffer in this life the punishment they have so richly deserved for their sins; the third, that they may be all the better preserved from the danger of sin, and may gain heaven; the fourth, that their virtue and holiness may be proved and increased. From this it follows that, when we have trials to suffer, we should take them with humility from the hand of God, who always means so well with us, and fully resign our wills to His, so that the suffering, which we cannot avoid, may not be without fruit for us. To-day I take the first class of men, who have most trials to suffer, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

God visits with trials sinners who are in the state of sin, that they may repent and amend; and woe to the sinner who, since he does not amend, suffers no trials! Such is the subject of the present sermon.

O God of goodness, one favor I have to beg of Thee, through the merits of Thy dearest Mother Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, for those sinners who have much to suffer; not, indeed, that Thou mayest free them from their sufferings, for that I leave to Thy fatherly providence, and, indeed, I would rather ask Thee, if they cannot be brought to repentance any other way, to increase their crosses; but that Thou mayest open their eyes to see how well Thou meanest with them by visiting them in this life with trials and adversity, so that this knowledge may make them return to Thee at once. But for all others who suffer, we beg of Thee the grace that they may bear all their crosses with patience for Thy sake.

Chastisement is good and necessary for a stubborn horse, or a disobedient child.

There is in a stable a stubborn horse, which will bear neither bit, bridle, nor saddle, and kicks out viciously whenever the groom comes near him; what does the owner do in order to tame him, and make him useful? Does he give him more food, and keep his manger always full, so as to subdue him by kindness? No, indeed not; that would only make him worse. He tries harsh measures with him; puts a severe bit on him, and ties him so that he cannot kick; he leaves him for a time without food, and then gives him only a little chaff and straw to eat; in that way the horse will soon learn to know his master, and to obey him. But is it not wrong to treat a poor, dumb animal so cruelly? By no means; the horse is of no use; he has to be made

useful, and therefore that severe treatment is good for him. You hear a child crying; there is a man behind him with a stick, who is giving him a good beating; what do you think, my dear brethren? Is he not a cruel fellow? Why should he beat a harmless child? But a wise man would think at once, that man is the child's father; he means well with him, and wishes to make him a good boy; doubtless, the child has committed some fault, and therefore it is good and necessary for him to be punished, if there is no other means of teaching him to do what is right.

And also for many sick people. Shown by an example.

The author of the life of Andronicus Palæologus, the second emperor of that name at Constantinople, tells us that that emperor was once attacked by a grievous lethargy, which kept him in bed for a whole year, nor could any medicine be found to help him, until a person of great experience advised the empress to annoy and tease the sick man in every possible way, so that he should frequently be moved to anger; if that plan failed, there was no hope of his recovery. The empress, who dearly loved her husband, followed the advice punctually; and to torment him all the more, she went herself to his bedside, and commenced to shake him about from one side to the other, leaving him no chance of repose, either by day or night. The emperor begged to be let alone, but she was deaf to his cries; and if he asked for anything, she gave him quite the contrary. At last he could stand it no longer, and called out in a rage for his servants and soldiers. Am I not master in my own palace? he said; must I allow myself to be tortured to death, and that, too, by my own wife? But the empress stood by and only laughed at him; while the servants and lackeys had to do the same. The emperor was nearly mad with fury. But by the violence of his passion the vital spirits were stirred in him again, his blood was warmed, and the foul humors which had caused the illness were soon absorbed, so that he was fully restored to health, and lived for twenty years longer. Now suppose that during his sickness he had sufficient strength left, would he not have seized the empress in his anger, and strangled her with his own hands? Not a doubt of it. But when the matter was explained to him afterwards, and he found out how well the empress meant with him, he thanked her a thousand times for the love she showed him, and his love for her was immeasurably increased. It was a good thing for the emperor under the circumstances to be annoyed in that way, as otherwise he would have succumbed to his illness.

The sinner is sick; he is an unruly horse, a disobedient child.

My dear brethren, what is the sinner who is in the state of sin? Such is the question that St. Augustine asks. He is a sick man, he answers, who is sunk deep in vice; he finds rest and repose in sin, as long as he enjoys the false pleasure it gives, and so he lies there in imminent danger of eternal death, unless certain means are used to save him. This is comformable to what St. Paul says, who, when exhorting sinners to repent, speaks of their arising from sleep: "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep."[1] What is the sinner? He is a disobedient, ill-behaved child, who, like the Prodigal in the Gospel, has run away from his Father into a distant land, even to the gates of hell, and has squandered away all the goods and treasures of his soul, all the merits of his former good works, all the grace and friendship of God, and all his right to the kingdom of heaven. What is the sinner? He is an obstinate horse that has shaken off his bridle, and refuses to bear the sweet yoke of his master. A madness against which the Prophet David has long since warned us, in these words: "Do not become like the horse and the mule, that have no understanding."[2]

God wishes to cure him.

Now, what shall the good God do with one who thus remains in the state of sin, if He still loves him, and desires his conversion? Hear His own words, in which He takes counsel with His Prophet Osee: "What shall I do to thee, O Ephraim? What shall I do to thee, O Juda?"[3] What means shall I use to make this sinner repent? What an extraordinary thing that is! Does the Almighty God then actually ask advice as to how He is to help sinners? Yes, as St. Jerome says, speaking of this text, He acts as if He knew not what to do; "as if the Lord wished to say: I know not what medicine to apply to your wounds."[4] What shall I do? Shall I allow the sick man to go on in his sleep? Ah! if I do that, he will awake only in the fire of hell. What shall I do? Shall I allow the unruly horse to run about the meadow and eat his fill of the rich grass? If I do that he will grow worse and worse, until I shall not be able to get any good of him. What shall I do? Shall I allow the prodigal son to go on in his evil ways and send him the means of continuing his excesses? Ah! if I do that, he will never think of returning to his father's house.

Other means have

What shall I do with the sinner? I will speak to him in a

[1] Hora est jam nos de somno surgere.—Rom. xiii. 11.

[2] Nolite fieri sicut equus et mulus, quibus non est intellectus.—Ps. xxxi. 9.

[3] Quid faciam tibi Ephraim? quid faciam tibi Juda?—Osee vi. 4.

[4] Quasi dicat: non invenio quam plagis vestris possim adhibere medicinam.

friendly manner by My inspirations: "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and will lead her into the wilderness; and I will speak to her heart."[1] Yes, O Lord, do so; for thus St. Peter was converted after having thrice denied Thee, and having persevered obstinately in forgetting Thee; one look of Thine was enough to soften his heart: "And Peter, going out, wept bitterly."[2] But what good will that do? Have I not often tried it before with that sinner? How often have I not exhorted him to repentance by Myself, by My angels, by his confessor, and by My servants, whom I sent to preach to him? How often have I not represented to him the uncertainty of the hour of death, the strictness of the judgment, the joys of heaven, and the eternal torments of hell, in order to warn him to amend his life? And in spite of all that, he is just as he was before; nay, he will not come to those sermons in which he fears that his conscience will be touched. What shall I do? I will send him still more health and temporal prosperity, and I will bless all his undertakings, and so I will conquer him by mildness: "I will draw them with the cords of Adam, with the bonds of love: and I will be to them as one that taketh off the yoke on their jaws: and I put his meat to him that he might eat."[3] Right, O Lord; for in that way Thou has brought to Thyself so many frail and sickly people whom Thou hast miraculously cured; and Thou hast won over many thousand souls, when Thou didst feed them in the desert. But, after all, that plan is even less likely to succeed than the former; for the more generous I have been to him hitherto, the more ungrateful and obstinate did he become; nay, he even abused My benefits to offend Me more daringly. What shall I do? I will fill his conscience with fear and anxiety, as I have often threatened to do to sinners; I will give him "a fearful heart and languishing eyes, and a soul consumed with pensiveness."[4] Good, O Lord! Thou hast helped many hundred sinners in that way; for they could not bear the gnawing worm of conscience, that left them no repose day or night. But even that has done him no good hitherto; he has smothered his conscience and drowned its clear voice by the manifold sins that he has committed over and over again. What shall I do? What plan shall I have recourse to, that I may induce him to repent, and to avoid eternal death?

hitherto not helped.

[1] Propter hoc ecce ego lactabo eam, et ducam eam in solitudinem, et loquar ad cor ejus.

[2] Et egressus foras Petrus flevit amare.—Luke xxii. 62.

[3] In funiculis Adam traham eos, in vinculis charitatis; et ero eis quasi exaltans jugum super maxillas eorum: et declinavi ad eum ut vesceretur.—Osee xi. 4.

[4] Cor pavidum, et deficientes oculos, et animam consumptam moerore.—Deut. xxviii. 65.

At last He must use the rod.

There is still one means left, O Lord, which Thy servant David formerly proposed to Thee: "With bit and bridle bind fast their jaws, who come not near unto Thee."[1] Subdue, then, this unruly horse; torment and annoy this lethargic sick man, and give him neither rest nor peace; for, as Thou Thyself hast said by Thy Prophet Isaias, "Vexation alone shall make you understand what you hear."[2] Punishment alone will arouse him; let the undutiful son suffer hunger and thirst, so that he may be forced to return to his Father's house. Good, then, says the Lord; since I have the eternal welfare of sinners at heart, "I will visit their iniquities with a rod: and their sins with stripes."[3] "I will kill, and I will make to live; I will strike, and I will heal."[4] I will torment them until they are cured. I will allow that proud man, that vain woman, to fall into disgrace; then they will correct their pride, and, by being humbled, will learn that I, whom they have hitherto thought so little of, am their sovereign Lord, and that I can put down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble I will send misfortunes to that unjust extortioner, that miser, that mistress of a family who is so hard to the poor; then they will enter into themselves, and will see with humility that it is from My hand that all temporal blessings come; and in the sorrow of their hearts they will cry out: "Our Father, who art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread." That impure young man I will throw on his bed by a violent fever; I will deform that vain and frivolous young girl by a hideous cancer; then their unchaste passions will cool down, and the dangerous occasions of sin will be removed from them. That gambler and drunkard shall in a short time suffer the pangs of hunger with his family; then he will forget his orgies, remain at home, attend to his work, and ask Me and others to have pity on him. This quarrelsome, litigious man shall have the worst of it in every lawsuit he undertakes; he shall be put to shame by his opponents, and then he will give up quarrelling and contending with others. "I will visit their iniquities with a rod: and their sins with stripes;" I will chastise those sinners with My rod; I will take away their consolation from them by death; I will send them one trial and cross after another; I will fill them with tears, and gall, and bitterness, so that life will become a burden to them; and then they will at

[1] In camo et freno maxillas eorum constring , qui non approximant ad te.—Ps. xxxi. 9.
[2] Tantummodo sola vexatio intellectum dabit auditui —Isa. xxviii. 19.
[3] Visitabo in virga iniquitates eorum; et in verberibus peccata eorum.—Ps. lxxxviii. 33.
[4] Ego occidam, et ego vivere faciam: percutiam, et ego sanabo.—Deut. xxxii. 39.

last open their eyes, and find out by experience how bitter it is to abandon their Lord and their God; and when they are deprived of all human consolation, advice, and help, they will be forced to turn to Me, to bewail their sins, and to amend their vicious lives.

Thus He draws the sinner by violence, as it were, to Himself.

For, as St. Gregory says, "the eyes that are closed by sin are opened by penance."[1] The merciful God has often taken similar vengeance on sinners. "I will go after my lovers,"[2] says the abandoned woman by the Prophet Osee; I will go to my lovers with whom it is well with me. What did the Lord do? "Wherefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns."[3] I will take away my corn in its season, and my wine in its season;"[4] as if to say, because My people have abandoned Me, I will visit them with crosses and trials, so that, like a traveller who finds the way blocked up, and is compelled to turn back, they may be forced to enter on a better way and to seek Me again. "And she shall say: I will go, and return to my first husband; because it was better with me then, than now."[5] And this, my dear brethren, is the only reason why our good God visits with trials and afflictions those who are or have been in the state of sin. He does not take revenge, as if He were influenced by anger, He rather exercises the mercy of a loving father; He chastises the sinner to make him enter into himself, and do penance for his sins, that he may not be lost forever. "But whilst we are judged," says St. Paul, "we are chastised by the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world."[6] Speaking of this text, St. Anselm says: God "does not spare us now, that He may spare us in eternity."[7] "Therefore," he continues, "they who commit sin in this life, and have nothing to suffer in this life, are in a deplorable state;"[8] for that is a sign that eternal sufferings await them. And woe to the Prodigal Son, if things had gone well with him in the strange land to which he went; or if his father, through foolish love, as many parents do, had sent him money to support him there; he would certainly have continued to lead a vicious life to the end! What a fortunate thing it was

[1] Oculos quos culpa claudit, poena aperit. [2] Vadam post amatores meos.—Osee ii. 5.
[3] Propter hoc, ecce, ego sepiam viam tuam spinis.—Ibid. 6.
[4] Sumam frumentum meum in tempore suo, et vinum meum in tempore suo.—Ibid. 9.
[5] Et dicet: vadam et revertar ad virum meum priorem: quia bene mihi erat tunc magis quam nunc.—Ibid. 7.
[6] Dum judicamur autem, a Domino corripimur, ut non cum hoc mundo damnemur.—I. Cor. xi. 32.
[7] Ideo nobis modo non parcit, ut in æternum parcat.
[8] Unde illi merito lugendi, qui, in hac vita peccantes, in hac vita non patiuntur.

for him that his hunger drove him to beg for the husks that were thrown to the swine, and that no one gave to him. His torn garments and the pangs of privation drove him back to where he could be well fed and clothed: "And returning to himself, he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger? I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." [1]

He thus brought back the Prophet Jonas.

In reference to this subject, we have in the Holy Scripture, my dear brethren, an example of a headstrong sinner, another of a proud sinner, and a third of a thoroughly wicked sinner. The first is the Prophet Jonas; the second, Nabuchodonosor; the third, king Manasses. God had commanded Jonas to go to Ninive and announce the impending destruction of that city on account of its crimes; but, whether through mistrust in the fulfilment of the prophecy, or through fear of exciting the anger of the king and the other inhabitants of Ninive, or through pride, because he foresaw that the people would do penance, and escape the threatened punishment, so that he would lose his reputation as a prophet, he disobeyed the divine command, and took ship, and went to Tharsis "from the face of the Lord." [2] His conscience troubled him on account of his disobedience; but in spite of that he went away, and refused to do as God had told him. There you have an example of a headstrong sinner. But was there no way of bringing him back to his duty? Certainly; for while he was on the sea, and was trying to get a little sleep, in order to forget for a while the torments his conscience was causing him, a violent storm arose, which placed the ship in the utmost danger, so that the sailors, after having cast lots, threw him into the sea, in order to save their own lives; the monstrous prison that then opened to receive him, the belly of the whale into which he was swallowed down alive, was the means of bringing him back to obedience, as he himself says in the second chapter: "I cried out of my affliction to the Lord; I cried out of the belly of hell. When my soul was in distress within me, I remembered the Lord." [3] When I was not in danger, I despised the command of God, and refused to do what

[1] In se autem reversus dixit: quanti mercenarii in domo patris mei abundant panibus, ego autem hic fame pereo? Surgam et ibo ad patrem meum, et dicam ei: Pater, peccavi in cœlum et coram te.—Luke xv. 17–18.

[2] A facie Domini.—Jonas i. 3.

[3] Clamavi de tribulatione mea ad Dominum. . . . Cum angustiaretur in me anima mea, Domini recordatus sum.—Ibid. ii. 3, 8.

He told me; but when I was thrown into the sea, and was sunk in the depths of that miserable prison, "I remembered the Lord;" I cried out to Him, repenting of my disobedience, and offered to do anything He wished: "I will pay whatsoever I have owed for my salvation to the Lord."[1] Thus freedom drove him away from God, and affliction brought him back. "And Jonas arose and went to Ninive according to the word of the Lord."[2]

Nabuchodonosor.

Let us now consider the example of Nabuchodonosor; he became so inflated with pride, that he caused himself to be publicly adored as a god, as we read in the third chapter of the Book of Daniel. Daniel, at the command of God, went to him, and tried to bring him to his senses by exhortations and threats; but all was in vain; the sick man only became worse. He would walk on the terrace of his palace, and casting his eyes on the mighty city of Babylon, say with pride: "is not this the great Babylon, which I have built to be the seat of my kingdom, by the strength of my power, and in the glory of my excellence?"[3] There was a proud sinner for you! Was there any means at all of converting him to God? Now mark what follows, my dear brethren. "And while the word was yet in the king's mouth, a voice came down from heaven: "To thee, O king Nabuchodonosor, it is said: Thy kingdom shall pass from thee, and they shall cast thee out from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with cattle and wild beasts; thou shalt eat grass like an ox."[4] Then thou wilt learn to live like a human being, when thou wilt first have lived like a brute beast; in the desert thou wilt acknowledge the God whom thou despisest in thy palace; thou wilt learn humility by being chastised. "The same hour the word was fulfilled upon Nabuchodonosor."[5] He was driven out from amongst men, and wandered about in the forest, without house, or shelter, or clothing; he ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dews of heaven, until at last his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails became like the talons of a bird of prey. What is become of thy pride now, O king? Dost thou acknowledge thy Master at last? Hear what he says, after having spent

[1] Quæcumque vovi, reddam pro salute Domino.—Jonas ii. 10.

[2] Et surrexit Jonas, et abiit in Niniven, juxta verbum Domini.—Ibid. iii. 3.

[3] Nonne hæc est Babylon magna, quam ego ædificavi in domum regni, in robore fortitudinis meæ, et in gloria decoris mei?—Dan. iv. 27.

[4] Cumque sermo adhuc esset in ore regis, vox de cœlo ruit: tibi dicitur, Nabuchodonosor rex: regnum tuum transibit a te, et ab hominibus ejicient te, et cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua; fœnum quasi bos comedes.—Ibid. 28, 29.

[5] Eadem hora sermo completus est super Nabuchodonosor.—Ibid. 30.

seven years in that miserable state: "Now, at the end of the days, I, Nabuchodonosor, lifted up my eyes to heaven . . . and I blessed the most High, and I praised and glorified Him that liveth forever: for His power is an everlasting power, and His kingdom is to all generations; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing before Him . . . and there is none that can resist His hand. . . Therefore I, Nabuchodonosor, do now praise and magnify and glorify the King of heaven; because all His works are true, and His ways judgments, and them that walk in pride He is able to abase."[1] Compare now, my dear brethren, the conceited idea the king first had of himself, with the humble and holy thoughts that now fill his contrite heart. That was the fruit of calamity; "at the end of the days" of my misery, "I lifted up my eyes to heaven."

Manasses, and often the Jewish people.

And woe to Manasses if he, too, had not been humbled and chastised! He was one of the most impious of the kings of Juda, who not only publicly insulted his Creator by adoring false gods, and building temples to them, but also led into all kinds of vice the people whom he ruled over; he "seduced Juda, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to do evil beyond all the nations:"[2] so that they became worse than the heathens. God had often spoken to his heart; but he never deigned to listen: "And the Lord spoke to him and to his people, and they would not hearken."[3] And yet, O the patience and long-suffering of the divine mercy! this impious man, sunk in crime, became a holy penitent and a public proclaimer of the divine praises. How was the change effected? The Holy Scriptures tell us that the Lord sent the Assyrians to attack him, and they bound him with chains like a common thief, led him off to Babylon, and threw him into a gloomy dungeon. There, in the darkness of his prison, he began to see what he could not see in the clear light of day: "And after that he was in distress, he prayed to the Lord his God, and did penance exceedingly before the God of his fathers . . . and Manasses knew that the Lord was God . . . and he took away the strange gods . . . and he

[1] Post finem dierum ego Nabuchodonosor oculos meos ad cœlum levavi . . . et Altissimo benedixi, et viventem in sempiternum laudavi, et glorificavi; quia potestas ejus potestas sempiterna, et regnum ejus in generationem et generationem; et omnes habitatores terræ apud eum in nihilum reputati sunt . . . et non est qui resistat manui ejus . . . nunc igitur ego Nabuchodonosor laudo, et magnifico, et glorifico, regem cœli; quia omnia opera ejus vera, et viæ ejus judicia, et gradientes in superbia potest humiliare.– Dan. iv., 31, 32, 34.

[2] Seduxit Judam, et habitatores Jerusalem, ut facerent malum super omnes gentes.– II. Paral. xxxiii. 9.

[3] Locutusque est Dominus ad eum, et ad populum illius, et attendere noluerunt.– Ibid. 10.

repaired the altar of the Lord . . . and he commanded Juda to serve the Lord, the God of Israel."[1] Woe to the Jews, also, if they had been always left in peace! Oh, how good and how necessary it was for them often to feel the rod of chastisement! What the Holy Scriptures say about them is wonderful. Nearly always, during their periods of prosperity, they rebelled against God, and, as the text says, turned their backs on His law: "They have turned their back to Me," is the complaint that God makes of them by the Prophet Jeremias, "and not their face."[2] But nearly always when they were tried by affliction, they changed about, and did penance: "And in the time of their affliction they will say: Arise, and deliver us."[3]

David and Augustine acknowledge how good trials were for them.

What a fortunate thing it was for David to be tried by afflictions while he was still in the state of sin! He says himself: "For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; I am turned in my anguish, whilst the thorn is fastened. I have acknowledged my sin to thee: and my injustice I have not concealed."[4] Mark, my dear brethren, how David calls tribulations first the heavy hand of God, and then a pricking thorn. You may have remarked how, when a person has something sticking in his throat, he works and strains himself to get it out; now, what is the best way of helping him? It is to slap him on the back with the open hand, for thus he will be assisted in his efforts to clear the windpipe of the obstacle that hinders breathing. Now, what David means is this: O my Lord and my God, how would it have been with me, if Thy hand had not so often chastised me! My sins would not have allowed me to draw the breath of love to Thee; but now, praise to Thy mercy, and thanks to Thy chastising hand, I am made right again: "For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me." Again, he calls tribulation a pricking thorn: "I am turned in my anguish whilst the thorn is fastened." Why? A person is running at full speed, and suddenly he stops. What is the matter? Oh, he cries, I have got a thorn into my foot, and must stop to take it out. In the same sense David says of himself: I had begun to run in

[1] Qui postquam coangustatus est, oravit Dominum Deum suum, et egit pœnitentiam valde coram Deo patrum suorum . . . et cognovit Manasses quod Dominus ipse esset Deus . . . et abstulit deos alienos . . . porro instauravit altare Domini . . . præcepitque Judæ ut serviret Domino Deo Israel.— II. Paral. xxxiii., 12, 13, 15, 16.

[2] Verterunt ad me tergum, et non faciem.—Jerem. ii. 27.

[3] Et in tempore afflictionis suæ dicent: surge, et libera nos.—Ibid.

[4] Quoniam die ac nocte gravata est super me manus tua: conversus sum in ærumna mea, dum configitur spina: delictum meum cognitum tibi feci; et in justitiam meam non abscondi.—Ps. xxxi. 4, 5.

the way of sin; and how far might I not have gone, if something had not occurred to stop me? Now I stand still and cannot go any farther, because Thou, my God, hast placed the thorn of tribulation in my way: "I am turned whilst the thorn is fastened." Woe to Augustine, if he had not been wounded by this thorn! Hear how joyfully and thankfully he addresses God, who chastised him: "Thou, O Lord, wert there mercifully chastising me."[1] Thou wert against me in everything, O Lord, and apparently didst treat me harshly; but in reality Thou wert merciful to me. Thou hast made bitter to me everything that could lead me into sin; Thou hast strewn the way of sinful pleasures with thorns for me; and therefore I praise Thy gracious providence, for I never should have freed myself from the miserable state of sin, if Thou hadst not been thus mercifully cruel to me.

Therefore, woe to the sinner who is left in peace, and is not chastised by God!

And woe to you, O sinner, whoever you are, if during your long-continued habits of sin you do not feel the thorn of adversity and the weight of God's chastising hand! Woe to the sick man, when he is gone so far that the physician says he is to be refused nothing; for that is a sign that there is no hope for him. Unlucky the horse that is allowed to roam about at will. If you see a horse in the field with one foot tied, you know at once that he has an owner, who will come to get him in the evening. But if you see one roaming about without bridle or halter, you at once think that he is of no more use, and that he is turned out to become the prey of the first wolf that sees him. O man, in what a miserable, dangerous state you are, when you live in sin! Yet if you are tied, if you have much trouble to bear, you can console yourself to some extent; for that is a sign that the great Master has still a care for you and your salvation. But if things are prospering with you, and you have nothing particular to trouble you, then, indeed, I am sorry for you, for you are in a bad way. "Sinners," says St. John Chrysostom, "should always be in dread; but more especially when they have nothing to suffer."[2]

For that is a sign that God is extremely angry with him.

For that is a sign that God is embittered against them, that He has no further care for them, and that He has delivered them over as a prey to the hellish wolf. "Do you wish to know," asks St. Augustine, "how great a punishment it is to suffer nothing?"[3] Ask David, and he will tell you: "The

[1] Aderas Domine misericorditer sæviens.

[2] Semper quidem timere peccantes oportet, maxime vero cum grave patiuntur nihil.

[3] Vis nosse nulla pœna, quanta sit pœna?

sinner hath provoked the Lord, according to the multitude of His wrath He will not seek him."[1] He will allow him to go without taking interest enough in him to inflict salutary punishment on him. If the anger of God were not so great, says St. Augustine, He would not allow the sinner to go unpunished; but because His anger is extreme, He does not punish him."[2] One man is given to all sorts of unjust practices, and makes much profit with his ill-gotten gains; another indulges in impurity for years, and yet has the name of being a good Christian; a third has not made a good confession for the last ten years or more, and yet he has nothing special to complain of; things go very well with him. How is that? God is extremely angry with him, and therefore does not visit him with chastisement, and that is a sign that eternal damnation awaits him. Many, says another holy Father, are disobedient like Jonas; but they are not cast into the sea like Jonas. Why? "Because the sea of the bottomless abyss is yawning for them."[3] Many have committed the same and more numerous sins than the Israelites in the desert; but they are not like the Israelites bitten by fiery serpents; why? "Because the worm that dies not is awaiting them."[4] Many who lead most wicked lives have, like the rich glutton, a very happy time of it here; why? "Because the eternal flames of hell await them."

The sinner should deprecate this anger, and beg God to chastise him.

O holy David, what reason hadst thou not to expect this divine anger to fall on thee, when thou didst cry, with a heart full of anguish: "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation!"[5] Allow me not to sin and to go unpunished! That my own son persecutes me; that I am driven out of my kingdom; that I am reviled by my own subjects; that Thou visitest my people with famine, war, and pestilence; these are punishments that are bitter enough; yet they are useful for my soul and they will help me to amend. They are punishments that bring me consolation, since they prove that Thou still hast a care for me: "Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me."[6] Yes, O Lord, I am ready to suffer more and more of such chastisements: they come from the hand of a loving Father; and therefore I will kiss with thankfulness the hand that thus strikes me. But one thing I

[1] Exacerbavit Dominum peccator, secundum multitudinem iræ suæ non quæret.—Ps. ix. 4.

[2] Ideo non exquirit, quia multum irascitur.

[3] Quoniam pelagus eos expectat abyssi sempiterni.

[4] Manet eos vermis, qui non morietur.

[5] Domine, ne in furore tuo arguas me!—Ps. vi. 2.

[6] Virga tua et baculus tuus ipsa me consolata sunt.—Ibid. xxii. 4.

beg of Thee, O Lord: "Rebuke me not in Thy indignation;" let me not run on in the road of vice without punishing me! This is the divine anger that even innocent and holy souls have feared, although they were not conscious of any mortal sin, so that they often earnestly begged of God to send them tribulations, as a sign that He was still their good Friend; but if they were free from trials for any length of time, they would complain to God, and examine their consciences more carefully, to see if they had not perhaps been guilty of some sin, on account of which He had determined to reward their former good works only in this life.

Therefore God means well with the sinner when He sends him crosses.

See now, my dear brethren, how fortunate in the midst of his misfortune the sinner is, when God chastises him here, in order to bring him to repentance. "Oh, happy the servant," says Tertullian with reason, "whose amendment the Lord insists on, and with whom He deigns to be angry in a fatherly manner."[1] And how wrongly and foolishly we often act by murmuring and complaining on account of misfortune or adversity, and by looking on God as if He were a hard task master, who, through ill-will towards us, takes a pleasure in seeing us suffer! Oh, no! the stripes that we receive from His fatherly hand are all so many proofs of His love. "Esteeming these very punishments to be less than our sins deserve, let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which, like servants, we are chastised, have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction."[2] So spoke Judith to the citizens of Bethulia, when they were besieged by the enemy, and were in sore distress.

Conclusion and exhortation to bear daily crosses with thankfulness.

Therefore, my dear brethren, no matter how numerous and grievous our daily crosses may be, let us bear them with humility and thankfulness from the hand of our heavenly Father, and at least be resigned to His holy will. He means well with us when He sends us crosses, if we have already committed sin; for He thus enables us to pay, with a light and easy suffering, the debt we have contracted, so that we may not have to suffer the far more grievous punishments of the next life. He means well with us if we are still innocent and have never sinned, (ah, how few there are of whom that could be said with truth!) because by trials He keeps us out of the occasions of sin, and gives us an opportunity of increasing our merit and our eternal glory. He

[1] O beatum servum, cujus emendationi Dominus instat, cui dignatur irasci.

[2] Reputantes peccatis nostris haec ipsa supplicia minora esse flagella Domini, quibus quasi servi corripimur ad emendationem, et non ad perditionem nostram evenisse credamus.—Judith viii. 27.

means well with us if he sends us crosses when we are still in the state of sin, which, I hope, is not the case with any one here; because, by sending us crosses, He is trying to bring us back to Himself and to His grace. It is better for us that He should chastise us here and reward us hereafter, than that He should spare us here, and punish us hereafter. Let us not be amongst the number of those wretched mortals who daily groan under the weight of the cross of bitterness and sorrow that they have to bear in the world, and yet lead godless lives. And, unfortunately, amongst the common people who have to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, nay, even amongst the poorest beggars, who have hardly enough to still the pangs of hunger, there are sometimes found the most abandoned and wicked people, who find in the very means that the good God offers them to be converted and to refrain from sin only an occasion of greater depravity, of robbing and stealing, of swearing and cursing, of blasphemy and despair; and thus, of the crosses that God sends them to bring them to heaven, they make by their perverse wills a road to eternal ruin. Alas, poor souls, if I pity any one, I pity you! You have to suffer here, and to suffer in eternity! You have no consolation here, and you will have none hereafter; you are tormented here, and will be tormented there; here you have a hell, and there hell awaits you also! What a terrible thing!

And to make use of them for repentance.

Ah, Christians, may God keep us from the madness of making such a miserable exchange of one state of misery for another! Let us rather, according to the wish and intention of our heavenly Father, and enlightened by the crosses He sends us, say, when we have sinned, the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "Thou hast chastised me, and I was instructed."[1] Thou hast punished me, O Lord, and hast enlightened me thereby. I adore, love, and praise Thy goodness and mercy, in having thus awakened me out of the sleep of sin! I now acknowledge and confess with bitter sorrow that I have often and shamefully offended Thee: "I will go and return to my first husband; because it was better with me then, than now." I will arise and go back to my former Master, with whom I was better off than I now am in the state of sin. If I have trials to bear in His service, I shall at all events have the consolation of knowing that I am His friend, His child, His heir. I resign myself henceforward, O Lord, to Thy fatherly providence, and humbly submit to the cross Thou wishest me to bear! Chastise my body, but spare my soul; act

[1] Castigasti me, et eruditus sum.—Jerem. xxxi. 18.

according to Thy justice with me in this life; but show Thy mercy to me hereafter, that it may be true also of me, that, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Amen.

On the Advantage of Trials for the Just and Pious, see the following fourth and fifth parts.

FOURTEENTH SERMON.

MARY IS THE REFUGE OF SINNERS WHO WISH TO DO PENANCE.

Subject.

Mary assumed into heaven is the sure refuge and helper of sinners who wish to do penance: therefore sinners should have recourse to her, to get the grace of repentance.—*Preached on the feast of the Assumption.*

Text.

Assumpta est Maria in cœlum: gaudent angeli.—Holy Church. "Mary is assumed into heaven; the angels rejoice."

Introduction.

That I readily believe. And good reason you have, O angels, to rejoice and be glad on this day of triumph, on which you receive into your midst your sovereign Queen, whose arrival you had so long expected! Rejoice therefore, and sing a hymn of praise to this ever-Blessed Virgin! But what do we gain thereby? "Mary is assumed into heaven;" our dearest Mother is gone from us, and we, poor orphans, are left behind in this valley of tears; and so, while you rejoice, must we weep and lament, since our Comfortress and Advocate is taken away from us? Yes; so it is: "to thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve; to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." Yet, what am I saying? Dry your tears, all ye mortals on earth, and rejoice, too, with the angels! "Let us all rejoice in the Lord," as the Holy Catholic Church exhorts us today in the Holy Mass, "celebrating a festive day in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, at whose Assumption the angels rejoice, and praise the Son of God." In truth, my dear brethren, we have all, without exception, sinners as well as just, good reason for gladness; for if Mary were not in heaven, the just would not have at the throne of God a Patroness, by whom it is God's will that

they should gain heaven; if Mary were not in heaven, sinners would not have at the throne of God a Refuge and Helper to appease for them the divine anger, and to obtain for them the grace of true repentance and conversion. Sinners, since you are in the majority amongst men, I address myself now particularly to you; if the number and grievousness of your sins deter you from returning to God, merciful as He is, then do not lose courage; rejoice; Mary is assumed into heaven; go to her boldly; she will certainly receive you, if you wish to be readmitted by penance to the friendship of God. This I shall now show in detail, to the glory of this Mother of mercy, to whom, after God, I must confess that I have to ascribe everything that is good in me.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary assumed into heaven is the sure refuge and helper of sinners who wish to do penance: such is the whole subject of this sermon, which shall be partly a panegyric of the Queen of heaven, and partly a source of consolation for sinners who have lost courage. Sinners, have recourse to the Blessed Virgin in order to obtain the grace of repentance. Christians, let us all honor and love her constantly: such shall be the conclusion.

O Mary, Mother of mercy, the gift that we expect from thy generous hands on this, thy glorious day of triumph, on which thou wert assumed into heaven to be the special advocate of sinners with thy Son, is the grace of repentance for sinners, and of true devotion and love of thee for us all. Help us, O holy angels, to obtain this request from your Queen and Mistress, Mary.

The grace of true penance comes through the hands of Mary.

Here I take for granted a truth affirmed by all the holy Fathers who have written in praise of the Mother of God, namely, that, in the present arrangement and dispensation of His Providence, God gives no grace to men which does not come through the hands of Mary. There is no mistaking the words of St. Bernard on this point: "God wishes us to have nothing, unless what passes through the hands of Mary."[1] Other holy Fathers call her the neck of the Church, by which all gifts and graces flow down on the mystic body, the faithful, from Jesus Christ, the Head. "If we have any hope, any confidence of salvation, any grace, we know that it flows over on us from her."[2] All this is truly a gift of the divine generosity, but we must know that we receive it through the hands of the Blessed Virgin. Therefore

[1] Nihil nos Deus habere voluit, quod per Mariæ manus non transiret.

[2] Si quid spei, si quid salutis, si quid gratiæ in nobis est, ab ea noverimus redundare.

we cry out to her with the Catholic Church: "Mary, Mother of grace, Mother of mercy."[1] "Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope."[2] From this truth, which I shall prove more in detail on a future occasion, it follows, as a matter of course, that the grace of true repentance for the sinner must necessarily come through the hands of Mary; for if all graces, without exception, are dispensed by her, certainly the grace of repentance is included amongst them.

And there is no grace which she dispenses so readily.

And, indeed, there is no grace that the Blessed Virgin is more ready to bestow, none that her true children, who through weakness have fallen into mortal sin and lost their right to heaven, can expect from her with greater certainty, than the grace to repent and to return to God. This readiness and generosity come, first, from the necessity of this grace, without which all other gifts and benefits of God can be of no use to the sinner, and there is no hope of his eternal salvation. If I have grievously offended God, and do not penance, which I cannot do unless God first gives me His supernatural grace, all is lost for me, and I am doomed to hell; so that, while I am in that miserable state, there is nothing more necessary for me than the grace of true repentance. Again, that generosity comes from the love of Mary for her Divine Son, and from her intense desire to increase His honor and glory, and to extend His kingdom on earth, which is increased by the conversion of sinners, to save whom from the power of the devil, Jesus Christ, Mary's Son, shed His blood, and died a shameful death on the cross. Thirdly, it comes from her ardent desire for the salvation of all men, and from the inexhaustible, innate charity and mercy that she has especially for souls that are going astray; a charity and a mercy that, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, are so great and wonderful that, dearly as she loves her Son, cruel as was the sharp sword that pierced her heart when she saw Him hanging on the cross, nevertheless, if it were necessary for our salvation and in accordance with the will of our heavenly Father, she is ready to nail to the cross, with her own hands, that Son whom she loves so much, so that we poor mortals might be saved from hell, and become heirs of the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, with reason is she called the Mother of mercy, and not in vain do we cry to her in our necessities, "turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us, O clement, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary."

[1] Maria. Mater gratiæ. Mater misericordiæ [2] Vita. dulcedo. et spes nostra. salve.

Mary is appointed mediatrix between God and man.

Finally, she is impelled to this mercy still more strongly by what she knows to be the will of her Son Jesus Christ; for He has appointed His Mother as mediatrix between Himself and men, and He has raised her in heaven, above all the choirs of angels and all the elect, as the advocate and patroness of sinners, that she may regain for them what they have lost, and be to them a city of refuge, in which they can be safe from the anger of the divine justice. Long before her birth, our Blessed Lady was prefigured in Queen Esther, who was raised to the throne that she might intercede with king Assuerus for the Jewish people, who were already condemned to death, and persuade him to revoke the sentence against them, and restore them to freedom. Another figure of that powerful advocate for sinners was Abigail who, by offering presents to David, soothed his anger against her foolish husband, the wicked Nabal. A symbol of the necessity of her help for those who are in the state of sin is the ark of Noe, in which alone safety was to be found from the waters of the Deluge. "Who is she," ask the angels in the Canticle, "that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun?"[1] We know that it is the most Blessed Virgin who is alluded to in those words; but why is she compared to the morning rising, to the moon, and to the sun? "The moon shines during the night," says Pope Innocent, "the aurora early in the morning, and the sun during the day."[2] Mark, my dear brethren, the explanation of the mystery: "the night is the state of sin;"[3] "the morning rising is the beginning of penance;"[4] "the day is the state of sanctifying grace."[5] Now, Mary is the aurora, the moon, and the sun at once; like the moon, she shines on sinners, that they may not, in the unhappy state in which they are, be hurried before the divine justice, and be cast into eternal darkness; like the aurora, she shines on those who desire to do penance, that they may obtain from God the grace of a true supernatural contrition; like the sun, she shines on the just, that they may be kept from sin, and may persevere in grace.

By whom Christ wishes sinners to be converted.

Jesus Christ, her Divine Son, has confirmed the truth of this to St. Catherine of Siena. "Mary," He says, "is that sweetest bait, by which I attract sinners to Myself."[6] No living thing is so shy as a fish in the water; the least noise, or the shadow of a

[1] Quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol? —Cant. vi. 9.

[2] Luna lucet in nocte, aurora in diluculo, sol in die.

[3] Nox culpa.

[4] Diluculum pœnitentia.

[5] Dies gratia.

[6] Maria est esca dulcissima, qua ad me peccatores traho.

finger is enough to make it dart down into the depths, through fear of being caught; yet, at the same time, there is no animal more easily caught than a fish, if one has only a well-baited hook. The same quality may be observed in sinners; like fish, they swim away from the hand of God into the troubled waters, and hide themselves in the abyss of their vices, and sometimes for whole years they refuse to allow themselves to be caught by the grace of God. God, who is so long-suffering and patient, will not compel them by violence, lest He should lessen His own honor and their freedom and merit; but He wills that they should of their own accord return to Him by sincere penance; and what does He do to effect that? "Mary is that sweetest bait by which I attract sinners to Myself." He uses His Mother's mercy as a bait to bring all those fish back to Him; they have some remnants of devotion and love to the Mother of God left, and so, by her intercession, they receive the grace of repentance, and thus from her hand they get pardon from God.

Before Mary came, God was very severe with sinners.

Oh, if in former times this Mother of Mercy and refuge of sinners had been in the world, the justice of God would not have taken such fearful vengeance on souls! I shudder and tremble when I read in the Holy Scripture how sinners often fared after the commission of sin, and I must acknowledge that in those days what the Lord said by the Prophet Isaias was quite true: "Hell hath enlarged her soul, and opened her mouth without any bounds;"[1] and has swallowed souls without number. For then, as our Father Cornæus says, "there was not Mary, the Mother of mercy,"[2] to appease the anger of God, and to rescue many a poor soul out of the state of sin by obtaining for it the grace of repentance, thus saving it from hell. In the very dawn of creation many millions of the princes of heaven rose in rebellion against God by giving way to a single thought; and their offended Creator hurled them all at once into the pit of hell, without allowing them a moment for repentance, and without leaving them any hope of pardon; for then there was not Mary, the Mother of mercy, who perhaps would have obtained for many of those rebellious spirits the grace of repentance.

Against sinful men on earth.

Later on men began to lead impure lives on earth, and the Lord was so angry with them, that He destroyed the whole earth by a deluge, and hurled down to hell numbers of impenitent souls. Mary, the Mother of mercy, was not there then; if she

[1] Dilatavit infernus animam suam, et aperuit os suum absque ullo termino.—Is. v. 14.
[2] Nimirum non erat tunc Maria, Mater misericordiæ.

had been, perhaps at her intercession God would have laid aside the rod with which He chastised the world so severely. Later still, fire was rained down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrha, and those cities, with all their inhabitants who were sunk in impurity, were burned to ashes, while again many sinful souls were cast into hell. The sea swallowed Pharao with all his host, while he was in the very act of disobeying the divine command. How often were not the Israelites punished by sudden death immediately after having committed sin? For there was not then Mary, the Mother of mercy, to take the sword of vengeance out of the hand of God, and to procure the conversion and salvation of many a soul.

That they are not now punished so severely is due to Mary's merciful prayers.

My dear brethren, if the world still exists in our own days, in spite of the fearful number of sins that are committed in it; if fire does not descend from heaven on many a wicked city; if we are not often exposed to the danger of a deluge, which we so richly deserve; if the earth does not often open under our feet and swallow us up, while we are actually engaged in offending God; if many persons, whose lives are more wicked and brutish than those of any in former times, are not at once struck dead by lightning; if an angry God bears so patiently with the greatest sinner, and waits till the very last moment for him to repent, who is the cause of that? Such is the question asked by Pomerius, an old author, who wrote about the year of Our Lord 490. He says: "Since evils are now continually on the increase in the world, why does God spare it now; for He used to punish far more severely sins far less than those that are committed nowadays?"[1] He answers the question himself by saying: "All this God does on account of the Blessed Virgin."[2]

Proved from Holy Scripture.

She is the rainbow that God set in the heavens after the Deluge, as a sign that He would nevermore destroy the world by a flood: "My bow shall appear in the clouds; and I will remember My covenant with you . . . and there shall no more be waters of a flood, to destroy all flesh."[3] Speaking of this text, Richard of St. Victor says: "Mary is the rainbow;"[4] and she is placed as a sign of mercy and grace, to show that God will not, as formerly, pour out the vials of His wrath on the

[1] Cum continuo in mundo accrescant mala; quare parcit nunc mundo Deus? qui olim multo his minora peccata acrius punivit?—Pomer. serm. ii. de B. V.

[2] Totum hoc facit propter Beatam Virginem.

[3] Apparebit arcus meus in nubibus, et recordabor fœderis mei vobiscum . . . et non erunt ultra aquæ diluvii ad delendum universam carnem.—Gen. ix. 14, 15.

[4] Ipsa est arcus in nubibus.

earth. When a church begins to fall to ruin, my dear brethren, and the roof already shows signs of giving way, the best thing to do is to build an arch under it to support it and to hold the building together. O infinite goodness of God! many a time does the world deserve to be destroyed on account of its sins and vices; but God says: "My bow shall appear in the clouds;" Mary, the Mother of My Son, "shall be the sign of the covenant which I have established between Me and all flesh upon the earth."[1] This is the arch that keeps the world from falling to pieces. With reason does St. Fulgentius say, "the heavens and the earth would long since have fallen to ruin, if they had not been sustained by Mary's prayers."[2]

Sinners have to thank her intercession that they are not now lost, and have done penance. Shown by a simile.

It is this Mother of mercy that I and many other sinners have to thank that we are not now in hell, that we have seen how miserable we were when in the state of sin, that we have done true penance, and that we now have a sure hope of heaven. I will here use as a simile a very interesting incident, related by St. Meliton, which I read in one of the works of Thomas à Kempis: "A certain pious person had trained a pet bird how to speak, and to say 'Ave Maria' whenever a knock came to the door, or when any one spoke to it. It happened one day that its cage was left open through carelessness, and the bird flew away out of the window. When it had been flying about for some time, a hawk attacked it, and was on the point of seizing it, when the poor bird, terrified almost out of its life, uttered its usual cry, 'Ave Maria,' and at once the hawk fell to the ground as if it had been shot, while the other bird returned to its cage." How many of us, my dear brethren, are like this bird? We are kept in a cage, that is, in the bounds of the divine law; but how soon we get tired of confinement! As soon as we find the door open, that is, when the first occasion of sin offers, we fly off at once to seek our freedom; but alas, what a grievous mistake we make; for we fly into the talons of the hellish bird of prey, as often as we commit a mortal sin, and how many times might he not have dragged us down to hell, if an "Ave Maria" had not helped us? One or two "Hail Marys," learned in childhood from pious parents, or in school, or at catechism, and repeated daily through custom, parrot-fashion, or some small remnant of devotion to the Mother of God, inspired by God during youth, and not quite forgotten even

[1] Erit signum fœderis, quod constitui inter me et omnem carnem super terram.—Gen. ix. 17.

[2] Cœlum et terra jam diu ruissent, si non Maria precibus sustentasset.

while the soul is in mortal sin, may have perhaps often lessened the power of the devil, shown the sinner his danger, and brought him back again among the children of God by true repentance.

As many must confess who are now in heaven.

Would that we could see the happy souls in heaven, and hear them relate how they attained salvation! How many would acknowledge that they were formerly like the bird that escaped out of its cage, and that some little practice of devotion to the Queen of heaven, which they performed daily, was the means of saving them from the claws of the devil, so that they were enabled to fly into eternal life through the open window, that is by the help of Our Blessed Lady (for St. Bernard calls her a window of heaven)? Such would be the confession of that woman of whom Father Ambrose Cataneus writes, who for years and years had concealed a mortal sin in confession through shame; but when on her death-bed, she prayed only once to the Mother of God, "O Mary, my dear Lady, do thou open my lips;"[1] whereupon she at once awakened, as it were, out of a dream, confessed the sin without the least trouble and with sincere sorrow, and, after having received the last sacraments, went into a happy eternity. There was a bird that had flown to the very gates of hell, and was on the point of being seized by the hellish hawk, and a single sigh to Mary saved her. O Mary, I also cry out, in the name of many sinners who are this very day in the state of sin, and refuse to confess their wickedness, either through shame, or because the habit of a certain vice has become inveterate with them, so that it seems an impossibility to them to be converted, or because they wilfully remain in the proximate occasion of sin, and therefore never do true penance: O Mary, (so you should say every day with me, sinners who are thus tied down by your sins) O dear Mother of mercy, open my lips, which shame has so long closed, that I may at last disclose the secret wounds of my soul in confession, and have them thoroughly healed; break the chains of the miserable habit, that have so long held me captive to Satan; help me to roll away the huge stone from the grave in which I have almost rotted away, that I may forever give up the company of that person who has been the occasion of sin to me, and may return to my God with my whole heart!

If the heavens opened, we should see that young man of whom Father Eusebius Nierenberg writes in his "Trophies of Mary." This young man, after having lost all his money at play, had

[1] O Maria Domina mea, labia mea aperies.

denied his faith, abjured God and the saints, with the exception of the Blessed Virgin, whom he would not renounce, and sold his soul to the devil forever. In this desperate state, abandoned by God and man, he happened to enter a church, where he saw an image of the Mother of God, that, as he thought, looked at him pityingly, and said to him: "Alas, unfortunate man, what have you done? But I can help you still." Moved by these words, he fell on his knees, and commended his unfortunate soul to the Mother of God; whereupon he saw the lifeless wooden image turn its face to the Child seated on its arm, and move its lips; and although he heard nothing, he knew at once that Mary was praying for mercy and pardon for him; but the Child turned His face away from His Mother, and this happened a second and a third time. "O Mary," cried out the wretched man, "remember that I did not renounce thee. Pray for me once more." And then he saw the image place the apparently living Child on the altar, and, kneeling down before Him with out-stretched hands, implore His mercy, until at last the young man distinctly heard the words: "Mother, I cannot deny you anything; be it as you wish." [1] The image then took the Child in its arms again, and resumed its former position, while the poor sinner, filled with consolation, repented of his crime with bitter tears, and from that time led a most holy life. There you have another instance of a fugitive bird being saved from the talons of the hellish hawk by Mary.

Shown by a remarkable occurrence.

Passing over many other examples of the kind, I cannot help relating one, which suits admirably the simile of the bird that escaped out of its cage, and which drew tears from my eyes when I was reading it. It is related by Theophilus Rainaud, out of a work of Father Ambrose Cataneus, who has written a long account of it in Italian. I will try to give you the gist of it in a few words. In the year 1200, there was in a certain convent a nun named Beatrix, who, through carelessness and the neglect of venial sins, had become cold in the love of God, and, as is generally the case, had gone from bad to worse, until she became quite tired of the convent, and wished to go back into the world. To this end she used the opportunity her occupation as portress gave her, procured a man's clothing, and in that disguise left the convent. As she was passing by the image of the Blessed Virgin, she turned round and said to it: "Mary, I must say good-by to thee now; I must leave thee; but

[1] Mater, nihil negare possum precibus tuis.

do not thou leave me. There are the keys of the convent; keep them; and there is my habit, which I am no longer worthy to wear; do thou give it to some one who is better deserving of it than I am. Good-by, dear Mother; I am going." She made her escape without any one knowing of it, and went off into a foreign land, where she was unknown, and there gave herself up to a life of vice, and thought no more of God or of His holy Mother. After the lapse of many years, a person came to see her one day with whom she had been acquainted when she was still in the convent; but she did not make herself known to him. After some talk, she asked him if he knew such-and-such a convent. "Certainly," he answered, "it is not long since I have been there." "And did you ever hear," she continued, "of a sister in that convent, named Beatrix? What do people say of her?" "Beatrix?" said he; "I know her well; I spoke to her before I left, and recommended myself to her pious prayers." Surprised at this, she asked him again if he was quite certain that Beatrix was still alive. "Not the least doubt of it," answered the man; "she was alive, at all events, when I left, and was mistress of novices: for many years she was portress, and has always been a model of virtue to all her sisters; she is now about thirty-five years of age;" and he then described her personal appearance. The description he gave was so accurate, that Beatrix was astonished, and knew not what to think. At length, driven by curiosity to find out who the strange nun was, she put on her disguise again, and went to her former convent, and asked to see Sister Beatrix. The supposed Beatrix came into the parlor, and the moment the apostate nun looked at her, she saw that she was the exact counterpart of herself. Filled with astonishment and fear, she did not dare to say a word; but the supposed nun first addressed her: "Do you not know me, Beatrix?" she said. "No," answered the latter, "I do not know you." "You are right," replied the other, "in saying that you do not know me, for you lost all memory of me, and shamefully renounced me when you left the convent; but can you not remember to whom you gave up your habit and the keys of the convent?" Here it at once occurred to Beatrix that she had laid those things down before a statue of the Blessed Virgin in her cell. "See," said Mary, revealing herself, "who I am. Immediately on your departure I assumed your appearance, put on your habit, and performed your duties as portress during the whole time of your absence. Not a soul has the least suspicion that

you left the convent; but meanwhile I have so lived that all the sisters have a high idea of your sanctity, and are surprised at the great change that has come over you. Come now and put on your habit again; do penance for your sins, and see that you continue the holy life that I have begun to lead for you." At these words Mary disappeared, and Beatrix, filled with shame and sorrow, put on her habit again, confessed her sins, and at the end of a holy and penitent life left her confessor a written account, confirmed by oath, of all that had occurred, so that after her death he might publish it to the world, to the honor and glory of the most Holy Virgin, the Mother and Refuge of sinners.

Encouragement to sinners to fly to Mary for refuge.

Sinners, what think you of this? Is there any one amongst you who has hitherto despaired of mercy and therefore made no effort to repent, on account of the multitude and enormity of his sins? Ah, let him fly with confidence to the Mother of mercy. If you have but a spark of love and of devotion to Mary left, there is still hope for you, if you are earnestly resolved on doing penance and amending your life. We read in the Book of Genesis, that when Agar, Sarah's maid, was turned out of the house and was wandering about the wilderness in despair, an angel called out to her: "Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand;"[1] beg pardon for your fault, and she will forgive you. Ah, would that I, too, could cry out like that angel, so as to be heard by all the sinners of the world. "Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand;" return to Mary, the Mother of mercy; humble yourself and beg pardon for the grievous sins you have committed; you may be certain of a kind reception from her. If she rejects you, then you are the first whom she has rejected; for up to the present no one who has placed himself under her protection has been lost. Go to her, then, at once. Perhaps you do not yet feel any desire to repent and amend; then I beg of you, for the sake of your soul's salvation, to pray, and pray without ceasing to her, that she may soften your hard heart, and obtain for you from her Son the grace of true contrition. Say with the Catholic Church: "O Mary, come to the help of a poor wretch, who is always falling, and who would wish to rise if he could."[2] O Mary, Mother of mercy, I am a poor bird that has flown even to the gates of hell; save me from the talons of the hellish bird

[1] Revertere ad dominam tuam, et humiliare sub manu illius.—Gen. xvi. 9.

[2] Succure cadenti, surgere qui curat, populo.

of prey; torment my soul; leave me no rest by night or by day, until anguish drives me back to my cage, and compels me to submit to the sweet yoke of the God whom I have abandoned!

And to the other hearers to be always devout to her.

By way of conclusion I say to all of you, my dear brethren, the words that Father Sebastian a Campo of our Society spoke on his death-bed, to the great comfort and consolation of those who were standing round him: "O children of Adam, serve and love Mary better; for you know not how necessary Mary's prayers are to you:"[1] how necessary, if you wish to live piously; how necessary, if you wish to receive many graces from God; how necessary, if you wish to be eternally happy. Have we hitherto served our Mother? Then let us serve her more diligently. Have we loved her? Then let us love her more earnestly; not like those who honor her with a mere lip-service daily or weekly, while they grieve her by their sinful hearts. Let us love her with an earnest, child-like, constant love, which consists in carefully avoiding all sin, and in following the example of her holy life.

Conclusion and offering of self to Mary.

O Mary, dearest Mother, if I can call thee by that name, must I not love and serve thee with all my heart? For next to God thou art my only hope, my only help and consolation; and I must and do acknowledge before the whole world, that whatever good there is in me I have received through thee! It is through thee that I am still alive, and am not in hell with the demons. In thee, next to God, I place my hopes of heaven, although I have so often barred it against myself by my sins. Henceforward I entrust to thy care and protection all that I have and all that I am. Do thou, O Mother, order everything, my life and the end thereof, according to thy will and pleasure! I renew the promise I have so often solemnly made in thy sodalities, that I wish to be thy servant forever, never to abandon thee, and to do all I can to further thy honor and glory amongst others. Ah, if I could only have the happiness of doing something that is really pleasing to thee! If I were only assured that I have ever during my life done even a single thing to give thee pleasure; then, indeed, would my hopes of salvation be more secured! O Mary, all I ask of thee is to obtain for me this grace from thy Son, that I may love thee more and more, and have a tender devotion to thee! If I should ever again be so unhappy as to lose my God through weakness, by committing a mortal sin, (which

[1] Filii Adæ, servite et amate Mariam diligentius: nescitis quam vobis necessaria sit Mariæ deprecatio.

mayest thou avert!) ah, then, at all events, do not take away from me my devotion to thee! As long as that remains with me, I can have a great hope of conversion, and consequently of salvation. But if I ever go so far as to forget thee, to receive nothing more from thee, and to have no confidence in, or love for thee any longer; then, indeed, there would be no hope for me any more. Receive me, then, O merciful Virgin, as thy servant. I shall henceforth never allow a day to pass without offering thee my filial service; every Saturday I will observe the evening fast in thy honor, or I will perform some other special work of devotion; every one of thy feast days I will dedicate to thee by a good confession and Communion; never will I look on an image of thee, no matter where it may be, without showing it due honor; and if my first thought on awakening in the morning is for God, my second will be for thee; if my first word is in honor of God, my second shall be, "Ave Maria." Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of the Visitation.

Text.

Exurgens Maria . . . abiit in montana cum festinatione.—Luke i. 39.

"And Mary, rising up, . . . went unto the hill country with haste."

Introduction.

Whither so hastily, O most Blessed Virgin? What impels thee to leave thy accustomed solitude, and to journey over the rugged mountains? The answer to this question we have in to-day's Gospel; and it was given by St. John, who, though hidden in his mother's womb, leaped with joy at the arrival of the Blessed Virgin. For his soul was still buried in the dark night, it was in the state of original sin, and was not in the grace of God; and it was to free that soul from the original stain, and bring it out of darkness to the light of grace, that Mary journeyed in such haste. Hear this ye sinners! If the number and malice of your sins make you afraid of appealing to God, merciful though He is, then hasten to Mary, who is most anxious to save your souls, that are going astray. With her you will be sure of finding grace and a kind-reception; nay, she will hasten out to meet you, and will obtain for you from her Son, whom you have

offended, the grace of true repentance, if you only pray to her earnestly for it, as I shall now show, to the greater glory of this Mother of mercy.

Plan of Discourse.

Mary is a sure refuge and necessary help of sinners who desire to do penance. Such is the whole subject, etc.—Continues as above.

For several panegyrics and moral discourses on the different Feasts of the Blessed Virgin, see the following sixth part.

ON THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

FIFTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

The sacrament of penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned after baptism; from which truth the following, as well as other conclusions, is to be drawn, namely, that he who sins grievously should have recourse to this means as soon as possible.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Misereor super turbam.—Mark viii. 2.
"I have compassion on the multitude."

Introduction.

Our Lord is so good and compassionate towards men, that He could not see those who wished to follow Him suffering temporal want, without pitying them; so that He went beyond the bounds of nature, and wrought a miracle in order to feed them, that they might not die of hunger; although He often scourges whole countries with the plague of famine, for the good of souls, that the people may be aroused to do penance for their sins. How much greater, then, must not be the mercy and pity that the same God has towards the souls of men; how much greater must not be His desire to succor them in their spiritual wants, and to give them that on which their eternal salvation depends? How much greater must not His pity be for the poor souls He sees continuing for years and years in the miserable state of sin? Yes, certainly, this is the misery and poverty that move the good God most deeply. I have already spoken of the patience

of God in bearing with the sinner, and I have shown how sinners should take courage from that, to do penance at once and free themselves from the deplorable state of sin. But if they are afraid to approach God, whom they have offended, then they can have recourse to Mary, the Mother of mercy, through whom they will certainly obtain the grace of repentance, if they only desire it sincerely. Now I go on to speak of the means that we must use in order to free ourselves from sin, and to do true penance. Here again we can see how wonderful is the mercy of God to the sinner; for the means that He has prescribed to do penance and to obtain complete pardon is a most easy and advantageous one, namely, the sacrament of penance. The explanation of this sacrament will supply me with matter for several consecutive instructions. It is a subject, my dear brethren, that is useful to all, and one in which most people require some instruction; because, either through ignorance, or through culpable negligence, many grievous faults are committed in this matter, and on account of those faults many souls, although they frequently go to confession, yet remain in the state of sin and are lost eternally. I say therefore,

Plan of Discourse.

The sacrament of penance is a necessary means of salvation to all who have sinned mortally after baptism. From this we shall draw for our instruction, amongst other conclusions, the following, namely, that he who has grievously sinned ought to have recourse to this means at once. There you have the whole subject of to-day's instruction.

Merciful God, we do not ask Thee now to perform a miracle in order to help poor sinners; only move them with Thy ordinary powerful grace, that they may without further delay make use of this necessary means! To obtain this grace from Thee, we fly to Mary, the Mother of mercy and the refuge of sinners. Help us, too, ye holy angels, by your prayers.

How the sacrament of penance is necessary to salvation.

I do not now speak of such an absolute necessity, that the sinner under no circumstances can obtain pardon unless he actually receives the sacrament of penance; for not even baptism is necessary in that sense; that is, the baptism of water; inasmuch as he who has not the opportunity of receiving baptism can be cleansed from sin, and save his soul by the efficacy of a perfect love of God, which is called the baptism of desire. Yet the baptism of water is called a necessary means of salvation in this

sense, that he who has the opportunity of receiving it, and deliberately neglects to avail himself of it, cannot go to heaven. It is the same with the sacrament of penance for those who have committed mortal sin after baptism. If I have sinned grievously, an act of perfect contrition will certainly obtain pardon for me from God; but there still remains the obligation for me to declare my sin in confession, when I have the opportunity of doing so, in order that I may receive sacramental absolution. For, as theologians teach, perfect contrition blots out sin, because it includes an earnest resolve to keep all the commandments, and consequently to go to confession when an opportunity occurs. If I have not that intention, no contrition can help me to obtain pardon of my sins; and if I died without confession and sacramental absolution, because I did not avail myself of the opportunity when offered, I should be lost forever.

This necessity does not arise from a human,

The necessity of confession is not a human invention, or a law prescribed by the Popes, as most heretics and opponents of our holy religion pretend. For these latter look on auricular confession as an insupportable burden, and have therefore made a point of crying it down, that they may be more at liberty to follow their evil inclinations and desires; because there is no doubt that the fear of the shame one feels in disclosing his secret vices is for many a great means of keeping them from sin, while, if there were no such thing as confession, that restraint would be taken away. Heretics themselves have acknowledged this. According to the testimony of Dominicus Soto, the Lutherans of a certain city of Germany once sent an ambassador to the Roman emperor, Charles V. to ask him to use his authority in re-establishing the custom of auricular confession; for they found that, when the people ceased going to confession, vice and sin increased in an alarming degree. But they were treated with ridicule, and looked on as fools for having abolished as a human law that which they themselves were forced to confess was most advantageous for the common good.

But from a Divine Law.

It is not a Pope, or an emperor, but the great God Himself who has placed this restraint on sinful men, and commanded them to declare their sins in confession; and that command He has made so strict, that He has determined in the law of grace not to pardon mortal sin, unless to those who make use of this means, provided they have the opportunity of so doing; and therefore neither Pope nor emperor can dispense any one, or even himself, from the obligation of confession, when mortal sin

has been committed. Jesus Christ promulgated this law to the world, when, after His resurrection, He instituted the sacrament of penance in the words He said to His Apostles, and in their persons to all validly ordained priests: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them: and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."[1] From the power given in these words it is evident that one must declare his sins to the priest; for how can I forgive or retain, if I know not what sins have been committed? And how can I know that, if the penitent does not declare his sins? It would be ridiculous for the minister of a king to receive full power from his sovereign to decide all disputes amongst his subjects, to condemn, to absolve, to punish, and to reward, if the subjects were not bound to go to the minister and state their case to him. And it would have been just as ridiculous for power to have been given to priests to forgive or to retain the sins of men, unless men were bound to confess their sins to the priests. It is therefore in accordance with a divine, and not a human law, that we are bound to confess our sins. And in order to eliminate all erroneous ideas on this matter, the Church in the General Council of Trent has publicly proclaimed it as an article of faith: "If any one denies that sacramental confession is instituted, or that it is necessary to salvation according to the divine law, or says that it is a mere human invention, let him be anathema."[2]

It is a most just law.

And truly, if we consider the matter, we shall see that this law which God has imposed on sinful man is a most just one. For what less could the great Monarch of heaven and earth demand from the miserable and presumptuous mortal who has dared to offend and insult Him, than that the latter should humble himself, and candidly acknowledge his guilt before the priest who sits there in God's place, before he receives pardon for his sins? What can be more just than for the sinner to confess that he has offended the Divine majesty, and to ask humbly for pardon? In olden times, among the Romans, if a man was overcome in combat, and wished to make peace with his opponent, he had to throw down his arms, and hold out a palm branch to him as a sign that he acknowledged him as his master, and would never

[1] Accipite Spiritum Sanctum: quorum remiseritis peccata, remittuntur eis, et quorum retinueritis, retenta sunt.—John xx. 22, 23.

[2] Siquis negaverit confessionem sacramentalem vel institutam, vel ad salutem necessariam esse jure divino. . . aut dixerit. . . . inventum esse hominum; anathema sit.—Trid. Sess. 14, Can. 6.

again bear arms against him. Now what does man do when he commits a mortal sin? He has with inconceivable audacity taken up arms against the almighty God and rebelled against His authority. Does he wish to be again received into favor by the Almighty? Then, if so, what is more just than that he should throw down his arms, that is, his sins, by humbly confessing them, and thereby acknowledge God as his master, and promise never more to offend Him?

It was in vogue from the beginning. Adam and Eve had to confess their sin.

Do not imagine, my dear brethren, that Our Lord has placed a new burden on us, when He obliges us to confess our sins. From the very beginning He exacted that confession, though not in exactly the same manner as He now does in the sacrament of penance, from those who offended Him, before He would remit their sin and receive them again into His friendship. Consider the example of our first parents in Paradise, after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, and you will see that even they had to confess their sin. They heard God coming towards them, and hid themselves for fear of Him: "And when they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in paradise in the afternoon air, Adam and his wife hid themselves from the face of the Lord God, amidst the trees of paradise."[1] But they could not hide themselves: "Where art thou?"[2] said God to Adam. But what a strange question for Thee to ask, O Lord! Can anything be unknown to Thee? And since Thou knewest where Adam was, why didst Thou not go to him at once? No, says Eucherius; that was not enough for the Almighty; Adam must come forward, and acknowledge his sin. And he crept out trembling: "I heard Thy voice," he said, "in paradise; and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself."[3] But that is not enough, Adam; you must confess your sin more clearly: "And who hath told thee that thou wast naked?"[4] You must have been doing something wrong? Yes, O Lord; "The woman whom thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat."[5] And thus, at last, the confession was finished. But Eve's turn had to come: "And the Lord God said to the woman: "Why hast thou done this? And she answered: the serpent deceived me." How did he deceive you?

[1] Cum audissent vocem Domini Dei deambulantis in paradiso ad auram post meridiem: abscondit se Adam et uxor ejus a facie Domini Dei in medio ligni paradisi.—Gen. iii. 8.

[2] Ubi es tu?—Ibid. 9.

[3] Vocem tuam audivi in paradiso; et timui, eo quod nudus essem, et abscondi me.—Ibid. 10.

[4] Quis enim indicavit tibi quod nudus esses?—Ibid. 11.

[5] Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Ibid. 12.

What have you done? I have obeyed him; "I did eat."[1] Mark, my dear brethren, how the Almighty acts as if He knew nothing of the whole matter; and how He examines them both until they confess the truth and declare what led them into sin. He acts, so to say, like a father who questions his child before punishing him, when the latter has committed a fault. Where have you been? he asks, raising the rod. What have you done? Will you not tell me at once? And yet the father may be well aware all the time of everything that has happened.

Cain was cursed because he did not confess.

God acted in the same way with Cain, after the latter had slain his brother Abel. "Where is thy brother Abel?"[2] asked the Lord, as if He knew nothing about what had occurred. Cain did not wish to confess, but tried to give an evasive answer: "I know not," he said; "am I my brother's keeper?"[3] "Why art thou angry?" asked the Lord, "and why is thy countenance fallen?"[4] But Cain remained silent. At last God asked him, "What hast thou done?"[5] Dost thou still refuse to answer Me? Then I will say what thou hast done: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to Me from the earth."[6] See what thou hast done: and, "Now therefore cursed shalt thou be upon the earth. . . when thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit."[7] Tertullian asks here, why did not God curse Adam and Eve, as well as Cain? Because, he says, they confessed their sin;[8] but He cursed Cain for refusing to acknowledge himself guilty of having murdered his brother.

In the Old Law the Jews had to confess.

How difficult the confession was that the Jews had to make in the Old Law! The nature of the sacrifice they had to offer in atonement was fixed according to the grievousness and quality of their sins, and this sacrifice they had to bring to the priest and offer publicly. For instance, he who sinned through culpable ignorance, had to offer a calf; he who did anything against his neighbor, a pair of turtle-doves; he who cursed or swore, a lamb; (if a lamb had to be offered nowadays for cursing, there would soon be a scarcity of lambs in the world!) and so on, for different sins, as you may read in the fourth, fifth, and sixth chapters of Leviticus. Nay, Bellarmine adduces the testimony of the Rabbis to show that they were also obliged to confess

[1] Et dixit Dominus Deus ad mulierem: quare hoc fecisti ? quæ respondit: serpens decepit me, et comedi.—Gen. iii. 13.

[2] Ubi est Abel frater tuus?—Ibid. iv. 9.

[3] Num custos fratris mei sum ego ?—Ibid.

[4] Quare iratus es ? et cur concidit facies tua ?—Ibid. 6.

[5] Quid fecisti ?—Ibid. 10.

[6] Vox sanguinis fatris tui clamat ad me de terra.—Ibid.

[7] Nunc igitur maledictus eris super terram. . . Cum operatus fueris eam, non dabit tibi fructus suos.—Ibid. 12.

[8] Ideo non maledixit ipsum Adam, nec Evam, ut confessione revelatos.

their sins to the priest, that the latter might offer the sacrifice in a certain manner. But even if that was not required, the confession was certainly public enough; for all present might see, from the sacrifice that was offered, what kind of a sin the person was guilty of. So that, if there was no oral confession, there was at all events a confession, and that a public one, by means of the ceremonies the sinner had to go through.

Therefore confession is necessary for the sinner.

Therefore God has always required confession, as a necessary condition of pardon for sin, and consequently for those who have sinned grievously it is a necessary means of salvation, when they have the opportunity. "Let no one," says St. Augustine, "tell me that it is enough for him to repent in his heart, that God, who forgives him, knows what he has done; for if that were the case, in vain would the keys be given to the Church; in vain has Christ said to His Apostles: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' To act thus would be to make a mockery of the Gospel."[1] Do you wish to know, O sinner, what you have to do? "Open your mouth to the priest; for that alone is the gate of paradise."[2] If you refuse to do that, or do it not honestly, there is no help for you; you are lost. Do what you will; give all you have to the poor; chastise your body day and night even to blood; fast every day on bread and water; pray as long and as much as you can; weep for your sins until you might bathe in your tears; if you have not the sincere intention of confessing your sins, everything else you do is useless as far as your salvation is concerned; you will be lost forever. St. Bonaventure writes of a religious of his Order who enjoyed a great reputation for sanctity; he was always in prayer, and almost constantly engaged in the consideration of God and heavenly things, so that he hardly ever spoke a word, and even made his confession with signs. On one occasion St. Francis happened to come to the convent in which this religious was, and the other brethren congratulated him on the extraordinary holiness of the latter; but St. Francis said to them: there is not the least sign of sanctity in him; you must know that he is a child of destruction, the devil has tied his tongue, that he may not confess his sins properly, as he ought. And the event proved the truth of these words, for the supposed saint, who was in reality a most wretched

[1] Nemo mihi dicat: ago pœnitentiam in corde: novit Deus qui mihi ignoscit: ergo sine causa sunt claves datæ Ecclesiæ ? frustramus Evangelium Dei ?

[2] Aperi os tuum sacerdoti; hæc sola est porta paradisi.

sinner, left the Order and came to a miserable end. It is and must be an undoubted truth, taught by the Catholic Church, that the sacrament of penance, when one has an opportunity of receiving it, or otherwise the earnest intention of receiving it when possible, is always necessary for salvation to those who have sinned mortally.

Therefore they are wrong who trust their salvation to the so-called general absolution.

From this we can see how grievously many are mistaken in this matter. First, those who place more confidence in the so-called general absolution, that is given at the hour of death, by priests who are empowered to give it, than in the sacramental absolution, that is received at confession. For I have been told that many, when in danger of death, are more anxious to receive that general absolution, than to confess their sins; and if a person dies suddenly, we sometimes hear people saying, "Thank God! the poor man died a happy death; for, at all events, he received the general absolution." And they think that enough has then been done to ensure the man's salvation. Now, my dear brethren, I must beg of you to attend carefully to what I am going to say, and if you talk to others afterwards about it, to be sure to tell them the honest truth, as you will hear it from me. For, generally speaking, they who seldom come to sermons, and who are most in want of instruction, make a great to-do about what they pick up here and there from others, and get hold of very wrong ideas, as I have often found to be the case. If they took the trouble of coming to sermons they would hear the matter properly explained, and would know how to speak about it. Now mind what I am going to say: I do not intend to speak disrespectfully of the general absolution, for I look on it as a holy, useful, and salutary thing for all dying people, and I advise all who have the opportunity of receiving it not to neglect doing so; and for my part, I hope to have that happiness when I am dying. But to depend more on it than on sacramental absolution, or, what is still worse, to neglect confession, or to put it off to the last moment, and to trust one's hopes of forgiveness and of eternal salvation altogether to the general absolution, that is a grievous mistake that some ignorant people make, and they must be taught to avoid it, in order not to imperil their souls. To put the matter clearly, either the so-called general absolution is a sacramental absolution from sin, and then it cannot be given unless after confession, either by words, or by signs, if the sick person is too far gone to speak; and that is a truth that no theologian has the least doubt of. But every absolution I

receive from any priest who is empowered to hear my confession is a general absolution from all sins; because one mortal sin cannot be remitted without the others. Or else the general absolution is not a sacramental absolution from sin, but merely an opportunity of gaining a special plenary indulgence, which the members of certain religious Orders are authorized by the Pope to grant to those who are in danger of death. In that case there is no doubt that it is most excellent, and is to be eagerly sought for, and thankfully received; but it does not help to the forgiveness of sin, since its only effect is to remit the temporal punishment of sin; nor can that be taken away, until the guilt has been remitted by sacramental absolution received in confession, or otherwise by perfect contrition, when there is no opportunity of confession. This, too, is a truth confirmed by all theologians. Therefore, if the dying person has a mortal sin on his conscience, and has not confessed it, or, in case he has no opportunity of confession, has not made an act of perfect contrition, there is no doubt that he will be lost forever, no matter how many general absolutions he receives, for they are not sacramental absolutions, and cannot free him from the guilt of sin, even if he received them from the Pope himself. Have you understood me clearly, my dear brethren? I take you all to witness that I have not said a word which any sensible man could torture into a condemnation or into an expression of contempt for the general absolution; for I repeat that I look on it as holy, and as most advantageous, and as worthy to be recommended to all Christians. I have merely stated the truth about it, that no one in such an important affair as his eternal salvation may be led into error in the matter. By divine appointment the sacrament of penance is instituted for all those who have sinned grievously after baptism, as a necessary means of salvation, in the sense in which I have already explained the word "necessary." If you refuse to confess the sins you have committed, when you can confess them, you will be lost forever. That is a truth that cannot be called into question.

Or to certain sodalities and confraternities.

Secondly, a still more grievous mistake is made by those who live on in sin, and trust their hopes of salvation to certain sodalities and confraternities they belong to, thinking that, if they are exact in performing the prescribed devotions, they cannot lose their souls, and, as some of them say, that they will be released from purgatory on the Saturday after their death. I strongly recommend you not to trust too much to those things. If you

are not in the state of grace, and do not free your soul from mortal sin before death by a good confession, or, if you cannot confess, by an act of perfect contrition, you will certainly lose your soul, and all your confraternities will not be of the least help to you. Thirdly, more stupid still is the error of those who lead impenitent lives and do nothing to gain their eternal salvation, but employ others in certain circumstances, or, as I have heard, actually give them money to go to confession and Communion for them a stated number of times. What a ridiculous idea to ask others to go to confession for one! It is the same as if I wished to have my own room cleaned up, and ask the maid-servant of another house to sweep out her own room. What good would that do me? If I want my room swept, I must take the broom in my hand and go to work at it, or else have it swept out by another. In the same way, what good can it do your soul if others confess their sins, and thereby purify their consciences? And to ask others to go to holy Communion for me is the same as asking a man to eat for me, when I am hungry. What good would that do my stomach? In the same way, how can it help your soul, if others are refreshed at the Table of the Lord? It is quite a different thing to have Masses said for one's self or for others; for the efficacy of the holy Mass, compared to holy Communion, is infinite as a sacrifice of atonement for living and dead. They who go to confession and Communion can certainly pray for you, that God may give you the grace of repentance, or may help you in a difficulty; but they can do nothing more. If you yourself do not try by sincere repentance and a good confession to recover the grace of God, their prayers in all the Communions they make will do nothing for your salvation, and very little for your temporal prosperity. If you have sinned mortally, you must go to confession, or else you will certainly be lost. Nor is there the least doubt of that.

How rash for those who are in the state of sin to defer confession.

Finally, it follows from all this that they are guilty of great presumption, and are in a most desperate state with regard to their eternal salvation, who, I do not say put off their confession and repentance to their death-bed, but who are in the habit of going to confession only once or twice a year, or who put off confession for a long time after having committed mortal sin. Foolish people, what are you thinking of? If any here present are in that state, I now speak to each one of them in particular. It is certain that you have to die. This is the first truth, O sinner, and it deserves your serious consideration. It is uncer-

tain when you will die, whether to-day, or to-morrow, or in a year's time. This is the second truth. It is uncertain how you will die, whether after a long illness, or suddenly, and this latter is often the case. This is the third truth. It is certain that, if you die in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever. This is the fourth truth. And yet you are not afraid to put off to an uncertain future time the use of the means that is necessary to your salvation? A nobleman was once accused to his sovereign of having committed a certain crime. How, he said (and that was all he alleged in his defence) how can any one believe it? Your majesty sees that I am always happy and contented; and how could I possibly be so, if I were guilty of such a crime? To be every moment in danger of death, and, if in mortal sin, of eternal damnation, who could be happy or joyful under such circumstances? He must, indeed, be a rash and desperate man who would expose himself to such a frightful danger. But you, O sinner, are guilty of that rashness and presumption! You are in such a state, that, if you were to die, and that may happen at any moment, you would be lost forever, and yet you put off your confession for a year, or a month. What am I saying? Can you dare to defer it even for a single day? Are you so insensible to danger, that you can venture to sleep soundly to-night in your present state?

Because future confession is altogether uncertain.

I will go to confession, you say, when I grow old. And who has told you that you will grow old? There is the greatest uncertainty about that. And if you die before you grow old, without having confessed and repented of your sins, you must go to hell for all eternity. That is quite certain. I will go to confession when I have settled this law-suit, or put my business affairs into better order; then I will be more at ease, and have more time to dispose of. Who has told you that you will live till the end of the law-suit, or to put your business into order? That is uncertain. But if you die without confessing and repenting of your sins, you must go to hell for all eternity. That is quite certain. I will go to confession when I am married; I have no time for it now; my head is full of other things. Who has told you that you will live to be married? That is very uncertain. But if you die before confession, and in the state of mortal sin, you are lost forever That is certain. I will go to confession next Easter, according to my usual custom. So much the worse for you that you go to confession only once a year. I would not give a farthing for confessions that are

made only from one Easter to another. But even supposing you make it all right, who has told you that you will live till Easter? That is uncertain, while, if you die without confession and repentance for your sins before Easter comes, you are lost forever. That is certain. I will go to confession on the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, as I have a special devotion for those feasts. That is very good and edifying; but has any one assured you that you will live so long? Meanwhile, if you die before the feast-day comes without repentance and confession, you will be lost forever. There is no doubt of that. Then I will go to confession next Sunday. Quite right; only be sure you keep your promise. But wait a little. After all, it is uncertain whether you will live till next Sunday, or not; and if you die meanwhile without confession and repentance, you will lose your soul of a certainty. Not, indeed, that you will be condemned to hell because you have not confessed your sins or repented of them before the feast of the Blessed Virgin, or before next Sunday, (because I cannot and will not insist on the obligation of confessing your sins or repenting of them immediately after having committed them, although, on account of the danger, it would be a most advisable thing to do) but you will be condemned to hell on account of the sins that you have committed, and have not repented of sincerely before death. But you say, if there is any danger meanwhile, I can send for the priest and make my confession, or at least I can at once make an act of perfect contrition. How do you know that? Who has told you that you will not die suddenly? or that your last illness will not at once deprive you of speech and understanding? or that the priest will reach you in time? But supposing all that goes according to your wishes, are you sure that God will give you the grace of sincere repentance, and help you to make a good confession, after you have offended Him so long without accepting His invitations to repent? All these things are very uncertain. Then, again, the confession and repentance of those who defer it till their death-bed is good perhaps in only one case out of a thousand; how do you know that you will be that one? That is again most uncertain, nay, improbable. But, no matter in what circumstances, if you die without confession and repentance, you are lost. That it quite certain. Will you, then, trust your salvation to such a treacherous uncertainty?

Conclusion and exhor-

Ah sinner! no matter who you are, I beg of you, by way of conclusion, for the sake of your eternal salvation, consider the

tation to sinners to go to confession at once.

state you are in, and how much depends on it. There are few Christians now in hell among the demons, who had not the same intention as you, of confessing their sins at some future time; but they did not do so. And they will all burn in the flames of hell, forever, because they did not confess and repent of their sins, when they could have done so. Therefore say at once earnestly from your heart, I will not wait till old age, nor till Easter, nor till the next feast of the Blessed Virgin, nor till next Sunday; but this very day. "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."[1] To-day the Lord calls me to repentance; now is the time to go to confession; and therefore, as soon as the sermon is over, I will try to remember my sins, and free myself from them by a good confession, that I may certainly be freed from the danger of being lost eternally. Such is now my firm resolution. Ah my God, I tremble when I think of the time that I have spent in sin! How have I dared to pass a single night in such a dangerous state, and to go to sleep knowing that I was Thy enemy, and a rebel to Thy authority? For if death had then suddenly surprised me, which could easily have been the case, I should now be with the demons in hell! How presumptuous on my part to spend whole months and years in such a wretched state, without sincere repentance or confession; while many whose sins were less than mine have been carried off unprepared and are now in hell! Infinite thanks to Thee, O God of mercy, for having borne with me so patiently, and for having given me such ample time for repentance! I am now resolved not to wait a single hour longer; for the present hour may perhaps be my last. I now repent of, and detest with my whole heart all my sins, by which I have offended Thee, my good God, who art worthy of infinite love. I will now free my conscience from them by a good confession, and as long as I live I will be on my guard against offending Thee again, and again falling into that miserable state. Have still a little patience with me, O God of patience, and give me Thy powerful grace to carry out this my resolution! For I am determined to carry it out, and at once. Amen.

[1] Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

SIXTEENTH SERMON.

ON CONFESSION AS AN EASY MEANS OF SALVATION.

Subject.

Sacramental confession is an easy means of salvation for the sinner: 1. when we consider the effects of this sacrament; 2. when we consider the nature of this sacrament.—*Preached on the seventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Attendite a falsis prophetis.—Matt. vii. 15.
"Beware of false prophets."

Introduction.

The worst of all false prophets is the devil, says St. John Chrysostom. The chief means that he makes use of to ensnare souls into sin is to represent to them the sinful object in a pleasing light, so that they are easily induced to taste the forbidden pleasure, and to commit sin without further consideration. When the sin has been committed, and they wish to free themselves from the tortures of remorse which accompany it, this false prophet again comes forward with all kinds of misrepresentations, in order to make them believe that it is most difficult and almost impossible for them to do penance and to make a good confession; so that sinners are frightened into deferring confession from day to day, and from month to month, and meanwhile they go on adding sin to sin, until their consciences become hardened in wickedness; they find rest and contentment in the state of sin, and finally give up all idea of repentance. Ah sinners, do not believe the traitor! He is the father of lies, and he seeks nothing but your eternal destruction. Go at once to confession, and acknowledge your sins with sorrow of heart. The sacrament of penance, as we have seen in the last sermon, is a necessary means to obtain the forgiveness of your sins and your eternal salvation; and, lest the lying spirit should deceive you, I add that it is a very easy means for him who has sinned mortally. This I shall show to-day, for the encouragement of sinners and to induce them to repent speedily.

Plan of Discourse.

Sacramental confession is an easy means for the sinner, when we consider the effects of this sacrament. That I shall prove in the first part. It is an easy means for the sinner when we consider the nature of this sacrament, as I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, sinners, no matter how grievous your transgressions are, take courage at once, and make use of the easy means offered you. Such shall be the conclusion.

To which may you, Mary Mother of Mercy, and you, holy guardian angels, help us by your intercession with Our Lord.

Confession is an easy means, when one considers the evil from which it frees him.

But how can I say that confession is an easy means for the sinner? What could be more difficult to any decent, respectable man, than to betray himself, to disclose with the utmost minuteness to another his own wickedness and the hidden deformities of his heart? Easy indeed! It might be easy enough for pious souls, who go to confession every week, and have nothing to tell but half voluntary distractions in prayer, slight fits of bad temper, carelessness in speech, a few idle words here and there, and similar imperfections. Yes, it may be easy enough for them; but for the sinner who has far more grievous matter to tell, whose sins are almost countless, who is buried in vice of all kinds, who has grown old in wickedness, and has to give an account of years of a vicious life, for him to kneel down and go over his sins one by one, according to their different natures and as they were committed in thought, word, or deed: the very thought of it is enough to make one shiver. A more terrible rack could not be invented for any malefactor, than the confessional is in such circumstances for the sinner. No; say what you will; it is a most difficult means to adopt. True, if we consider the matter superficially, and as it is apt to appear at first sight, it will seem difficult; but think, O sinner, what a terrible burden it frees you from; how fearful the evil from which it releases you, and you will have to acknowledge that the difficulty you will find in it is small indeed.

A sick man thinks it easy to take the bitterest medicine, if it will restore him to health.

A sick man does not think it very agreeable to take medicine; its bitterness causes him disgust; but when he is suffering from a virulent fever, he is ready to take anything that will cure him and restore him to health. If a single draught, as bitter as gall, could save him from the danger of death, not to speak of its restoring him at once to perfect health, oh, he would say, how fortunate I am in being cured so easily! What a good thing

it is that my doctor is so skilful, that he can cure me at once of such a dangerous and painful illness. Other sick people have to be tortured by burning and cutting; and I, too, would willingly have suffered the same torture, in order to regain my health; but now, thanks be to God, I have come through it very easily. Mark, my dear brethren, how the sick man looks on the bitter and disgusting medicine as an easy and agreeable means of recovery, when he thinks of the danger from which it frees him.

The sinner suffers from a dangerous illness and ought to take any medicine that will cure him.

O sinner, in what a dangerous state you are when you are in mortal sin! Hear how one who was a sinner like you, king David, cries out to God from the bed of his sins: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak: heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled, and my soul is troubled exceedingly. Turn to me, O Lord, and deliver my soul: O save me, for Thy mercy's sake. For there is no one in death that is mindful of Thee; and who shall confess to Thee in hell?"[1] There is a description of a lamentable state indeed, and it is the state in which you are; for you are suffering from an illness that will certainly bring you to eternal death, unless you are cured. Do you not understand what it is to be an enemy of the almighty God, to be separated from God, your sovereign Good, and to live under God's hatred and malediction? Such is your condition at present; you are a bond-slave of the cruel demons who are eagerly awaiting but a sign from their Creator to hurry you down to the abyss of hell. You have no more claim to the kingdom of heaven; the only reward you are entitled to is eternal confusion, eternal hunger and thirst, eternal stench, and the eternal flames of hell. See now if there is anything too difficult for you to do, in order to be freed from such a dangerous illness, and, so to speak, from such an endless evil. If it were necessary, in order to obtain the forgiveness of your sins, that you should give away all you have and in future beg your bread from door to door; if it were necessary for you to fast every day on bread and water, to have but one hour's sleep at night on a hard bed, to live in a cave amongst wild beasts, to beat your breast with a stone, to tear your flesh with iron spurs, and to continue that mode of life till you die: O great and infinite God, it would certainly be but right that I, a miserable worm of the earth, who have dared to offend Thy

[1] Miserere mei, Domine, quoniam infirmus sum; sana me, Domine, quoniam conturbata sunt ossa mea, et anima mea turbata est valde. Convertere, Domine, et eripe animam meam; salvum me fac propter misericordiam tuam. Quoniam non est in morte qui memor sit tui; in inferno autem, quis confitebitur tibi?—Ps. vi. 3–6.

infinite Majesty, should perform all those austerities during my whole life, in order to appease Thy anger against me; it certainly would not be an excessive satisfaction, nay, it would not be enough to compensate for the insults I have offered Thee. And if I had to lead a life of such mortfication till the last day, I should still look on it as a great favor to be thus enabled to escape the fire of hell, which is long since due to me, to free my soul from sin, even if I had committed but one, and to regain Thy grace and favor and my forfeited right to eternal happiness. Have not the blind heathens of former times cut themselves most cruelly with knives, and offered their own children to be burnt in sacrifice, in order to atone for their transgressions, and to deprecate the wrath of their dumb idols and the devils that dwelt in them?

Much more should he be willing to use such an easy means as confession.

But, O God of goodness and mercy, how easy it is to appease Thee! How cheaply we can purchase Thy grace and the pardon of our sins! How little Thou requirest of us in satisfaction for the insults we have offered Thee! How small is the price we have to pay to be saved from hell, and to gain all the happiness of Thy kingdom! If I have, as is, alas, the case, offended Thee a hundred thousand times, if my sins are more numerous than the drops of water in the sea, what is required to regain Thy grace? Nothing but to confess my sins with true sorrow to one man; and if I do that, my sins disappear at once; the flames of hell are extinguished as far as I am concerned; I again become Thy friend and beloved child as before, and a lawful heir to the kingdom of heaven Thou hast prepared for me. Remember, this, O sinners; no matter how often and grievously you have offended the great God; all that He requires of you, in order to forgive you, is that you truly repent of your sins and make a good confession. If you had offended a mere mortal like yourselves, could you offer him a smaller satisfaction than this? Should we not, then, rejoice and thank God, for having supplied us with such an easy means of getting rid of such a great evil, of throwing off the load of our sins, of escaping hell and gaining heaven?

Shown by a simile.

Father Paul Segneri, in his book called "The Christian Man," relates that, while a peasant was once sleeping in a field, a poisonous adder crawled down his throat and entered his stomach. We can easily imagine the torture that the poor man suffered from his unwelcome guest. But what hope was there of relieving him? If the adder bit him, there was an end of him at

once. He was fortunate enough to come across an experienced doctor, who suggested a plan to free him from his torment. And what was that plan? He made the peasant stand on his head, with his feet in the air, while he held a bowl of milk before his open mouth. The plan succeeded admirably; the adder, attracted by the milk, came out through the man's throat and fell into the bowl. If that story is true, the means by which the man was freed from his misery, was easy enough. A similar means, it seems to me, has been provided by the heavenly Physician, the good God, to save the sinner from eternal death, for in His mercy He has instituted the sacrament of penance for that purpose. It is far too mild a comparison to say that mortal sin is like a poisonous serpent; yet this is the simile the Holy Ghost Himself uses by the Wise Ecclesiasticus, when he warns us all to "flee from sin as from the face of a serpent."[1] But, unfortunately, how often does it not happen that men daily swallow down these poisonous adders and serpents, not by chance, or through misfortune, but in their waking moments, well knowing what they do, with the full consent of their will, nay, with joy and pleasure, as if they were swallowing a most agreeable food or drink; and they fill themselves therewith to repletion! But how these serpents bite when the pleasure of sin is passed away, they can speak of who have ever been in the unhappy state of sin. And if the poisonous reptile remains quiet in the conscience, there is no hope for the life of the soul. What is to be done? What medicine is to be used against the monster of sin? The heavenly Physician has provided us with a most easy and agreeable one in the sacrament of penance. The poor sinner has nothing to do but to stand on his head, that is to humble himself, to open his mouth, confess his sin, and thus easily and gently, without doing himself the least harm, get rid of the poisonous adder he has swallowed. Could the almighty God have invented an easier means of curing the sinner and saving him from the danger of eternal death?

Confession is an easy means, also, because it will surely heal the maladies of the soul.

Again, a medicine is called easy when, although it is bitter, yet it is sure to bring back health. If doctors only knew where to find such medicines, there would not be so many poor, sick people confined to their beds for so long; but how often the doctors are obliged to consult and to study for days and days, before they are able to discover the nature of the illness they are called on to cure? How many bitter draughts must not the patient drink,

[1] Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata.—Ecclus. xxi. 2.

which, instead of giving you relief, only make you worse? And
[illegible] they have discovered the proper medicine, what
[illegible] time it takes before the cure is really effected, and the
sick man completely restored to health? Consider the example
of the leper in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Lord," he cries,
"if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." And what did the
compassionate Lord do? "And Jesus, stretching forth His hand
touched him, saying: I will. Be thou made clean." Though
had He spoken these words, when the man's illness disappeared
at once: "And forthwith his leprosy was cleansed." If we had
been present on that occasion, my dear brethren, and had seen
that sudden cure, what would we have thought of it? Would
we not have cried out in astonishment, A miracle, a miracle!
Blessed be Thy goodness, O God of mercy, for Thou workest
a similar miracle every day for the salvation of souls. Am I
suffering from a spiritual leprosy so that I am sick to death?
Have I been in that woeful state for thirty, forty, or many years?
There has prepared for me in the sacrament of penance a medi-
cine that will cure me perfectly the first time I take it? The
moment I confess my sins, and hear the words of absolution, the
cure is completed, forthwith my leprosy is cleansed. From being
sick unto death, I have become fully restored to health, as if
nothing had ever been the matter with me: from being the
hated enemy, I have become Thy just and holy friend, and Thou
assurest me that Thou wilt never for all eternity remember my
sins again. And is that the means that I look on as too long
and disagreeable?

Because it is always at hand.

Finally, in a dangerous illness, one has not always a doctor at
hand. He is sent for, two, three, four times, and is not at
home; frequently he cannot come because he is engaged elsewhere;
and when he does come, he prescribes a costly medicine
that entails a great deal of expense; a long time is required to
prepare it at the apothecary's, etc. All these circumstances
increase the difficulty of the cure. You are helped much easier
and quicker. O sinner, when you are suffering from a spiritual
malady. All you have to do is to come and acknowledge your
sins in confession, and you are cured. The medicine does not
cost you a farthing: you get absolution for nothing: no more
time is required than is necessary for the priest to pronounce
the sacramental words: and nearly everywhere you go, you have

[1] Domine, si vis potes me mundare.—Matt. viii. 2.
[2] Et extendens Jesus manum, tetigit eum, dicens: Volo. Mundare.—Ibid. 3.
[3] Et continuo mundata est lepra eius.—Ibid.

for those who are grown old in sin, to heal them and save them from hell, but they do not come; they are afraid to put in an appearance, and that frequently because they exaggerate the difficulty of the means appointed for their cure, and so despair of it. But is that a difficult remedy which heals so quickly and so surely? which costs so little, and is ready at any moment? and, most of all, which heals such a dangerous and grievous illness? Do you, I say, look on that means as too difficult? Then, if so, you do not know the misery of the state in which you are; you do not understand what it is to be saved from eternal flames; nor do you attach any importance to your salvation. But let us consider the matter more closely. In what does the imaginary great difficulty consist? I have proved that it is easy for one who has sinned grievously to receive the sacrament of penance when we look at its effects; for it frees the sinner from an immense evil quickly, surely, and easily, and the opportunity of receiving it is always at hand. And I add now that the sacrament of penance is an easy means when we consider what it is in itself, in its own nature, as I shall show in the

Second Part.

Everything necessary for the sacrament of penance is easy.

What is required on the sinner's part to receive the sacrament of penance is the examination of conscience, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, the confession of his sins, and the fulfilment of the penance enjoined him. That is all. And what terrible difficulty is there about it? The examination of conscience? What is easier than for me to remember what I have been doing for many years against God and His law? I know that there are some anxious souls who torment themselves about this examination; but they give themselves much more trouble than they need about it; I will speak on this matter on a future occasion. Perhaps the sorrow for past sin, or the purpose of amendment, is the difficulty? But these things are in the power of my own free will, with the help of God's grace, which is never wanting to me, if I earnestly desire it from the good God. If I am only sincere about changing my sinful life, there is nothing easier than to repent of and detest that by which I know I have offended so good a God, and deserved hell fire. In the Old Law, if a sinner wished to obtain forgiveness, he had to excite a perfect sorrow through the motive of a perfect love of God; but now, in the sacrament of penance, the good God is

satisfied with an imperfect sorrow, which requires far less trouble than the first, so that the Lord receives His rebellious children back again into His favor, even when they return to Him through love of their own interest, that is, through fear of eternal punishment and hope of an eternal reward. Is the difficulty perhaps in the performance of the penance enjoined? But how could that be? It is the practice of most confessors nowadays, and that, too, with good reason, to impose such slight penances, that, when compared with the sins for which they are imposed, they hardly deserve the name of penance.

The greatest difficulty is to declare one's sins.

So it seems, then, that the whole of the terrible difficulty consists in the confession of one's sins? Yes, this it is which makes many a one shudder, fills him with fear and anguish, so that he can hardly articulate, while he trembles in every limb of his body, especially when he has very shameful or disgraceful sins to confess. This it is that people fear, as if it were a burning furnace, through which they had to go to a painful death. But let us consider the matter reasonably, and we shall see that the cause of this anxiety is merely imaginary, and, therefore, that the difficulty is not a real one, and, at all events, is not half so terrible as people think. For, when I am going to confession, even if I have the most horrible sins to tell, who is to be my accuser? I myself, and no one else. Who is he to whom I have to make my accusation? A man like myself. What sort of a sentence have I to expect? If I do my part all right, none but a favorable one, by which I shall be justified and declared innocent. Ought not this help to console me, and to lessen the shame I imagine I must feel?

But this is easy, because the sinner is his own accuser.

For, in the first place, what could be more advantageous or consoling for me, than that I myself should be my own accuser? If I had to listen to others making charges against me, and disclosing all my disgraceful actions to a judge in the presence of others; then, indeed, I should have cause to blush for shame; for my accusers might exaggerate my guilt through malice, hatred, envy, or vindictiveness. But as it is, I am my own accuser, and that, too, of my own free will, through love of God and the desire of saving my soul. I am the only one to say a word against myself, and implicit confidence must be placed in what I say, nor shall I be under any necessity of appealing to any one else. There are no witnesses required, no counsellors; the whole affair is conducted between me and my judge, and the examination and sentence are kept a profound secret,

so that no one can have the least knowledge concerning them.

Because the judge is a man like himself.

Again, who is the judge to whom I must acknowledge my sins? He is a poor mortal like myself. If God were to send an angel, or a seraph down from heaven, to hear my confession, in visible shape, then, indeed, I might have reason to feel anxious and afraid; because the angel would not have a frail nature like me, nor flesh like me, nor would he be subject to sin and passion like me, nor would he ever have experienced the weaknesses, and the allurements and temptations to sin which assail me; and therefore he could not have such great pity for me. But the good God has appointed as my judge one who is in all respects like myself, who has the same nature, the same inclinations, miseries, weaknesses, and is exposed to the same temptations that assail me, who can sin as I do, and perhaps has committed more numerous and grievous sins than I have; so that he can and must have compassion on my frailty. Hence St. Paul says, by way of consolation, to all sinners: "Every high-priest taken from among men is ordained for men in the things that appertain to God . . . who can have compassion on them that are ignorant and that err: because he himself also is compassed with infirmity."[1] Besides (so each of you may say to himself), I can choose whom I will among those who are empowered to act as my judges; I can select one who does not know and has never seen me; I am not obliged to tell him my name; I can go to him early in the morning or late in the evening, so that he cannot see me; and, if I wish, I can cover my face.

To whom he has to confess his sins but once, and that under strict secrecy.

To this judge I must declare the sins I have committed, and that but once during my whole life; for when I have once confessed them properly, I shall never be obliged to confess them again. In addition to that, the good God has taken such great care of my good name, that He has bound this judge under pain of hell fire to the strictest secrecy, so that in no imaginable circumstances, not even to save his life, nor to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the whole world, to save many thousand souls from eternal damnation, can that judge ever reveal a single sin he hears from me, either by word or sign, to others; and not only that, but he is not allowed to speak of it to myself, unless he has first asked and obtained my permission to speak with me outside of confession, after he has given me absolution, of what

[1] Omnis namque pontifex ex hominibus assumptus pro hominibus constituitur in iis, quæ sunt ad Deum . . . . . qui condolere possit iis qui ignorant et errant: quoniam et ipse circumdatus est infirmitate.—Hebr. v. 1, 2.

I have told him. So that my sin is better hidden with him, than it is with myself; for I might make it known to others, through talkativeness, or in confidence, or in order to humble myself, whilst my confessor dare not attempt such a thing. My conscience may often reproach me with the sins I have committed; my confessor can never do so. This is an undoubted fact, my dear brethren, and there is neither law, nor dispensation, nor power in the whole world, which can ever free a confessor from this obligation of silence. How could the good God have made confession easier or more consoling?

Because his sentence is absolution and justification.

Finally, he who is appointed by God as my judge holds the place of God, not to condemn, but to absolve me; not to reject, but to receive me; and when I have finished my accusation, and am otherwise in the proper dispositions, the sentence that I have a right to is my justification, and it is passed in these words: "I absolve thee;" I declare thee free from all thy sins; that is to say, I remit all the debt you have contracted with God; I loose the chains that bound you in the slavery of the devil; I open the dungeon in which you were imprisoned, and allow you to go forth free; I blot out your name from the book of eternal death, and write it in the book of eternal life; you may now go in peace, for I declare you innocent and holy; and I acknowledge you as a beloved friend and child of God, and as a lawful heir of the kingdom of heaven. All this is comprised in my sentence, "I absolve Thee." Therefore I must be convinced that the sacrament of penance is not, as some imagine, a hard and difficult, but rather an easy and most consoling way of escaping eternal damnation, of gaining the happiness of heaven.

Malefactors are treated far more severely by human justice.

Oh! if all malefactors could thus easily satisfy human justice, if they had nothing more difficult to do than the sinner who gets pardon in the sacrament of penance, would any of them have reason to complain of undue severity? But it is quite different with them. For instance, a man is suspected of murder; he is arrested at once, dragged through the public streets in presence of all, and thrown into prison. There he has to remain sometimes for months, without comfort or consolation, until sufficient evidence regarding the crime has been collected; and at last, when he is almost worn out by his confinement, he is brought to trial. If he persists in denying the crime, he has to suffer a torture that is often more painful than death itself; if he confesses his guilt at once, he is again thrown into prison, heavily ironed, and has nothing but the sword or the wheel to

expect as the reward of his confession. So severe is human justice with evil-doers. And now, O sinner, compare these two, the manner in which God acts towards the sinner in the sacrament of penance, and that in which the justice of men acts towards malefactors, and then, if you can, you may complain of the severity and difficulty of the sacrament of penance. If the murderer, after his arrest, had nothing else to do but to declare his guilt to a respectable man in strict secrecy, in order to be set at liberty, do you think he would be likely to make a great difficulty about it? On the contrary, he would face his judge joyfully, and at once make the necessary confession, before the whole town, if required.

Therefore the sinner cannot complain of the difficulty of confession.

And Thou, O great Monarch of heaven and earth, requirest from the malefactor who has dared to offend Thee twenty, fifty, a hundred, a thousand times, and to put to death Thy beloved Son, each time, as far as in him lay; whom Thou hast at any moment in Thy hands, and canst condemn to hell at once after he has sinned; from him, I say, Thou requirest nothing but that he should confess his sins to a man like himself, who holds Thy place, and who may be utterly unknown to him, and confess them with sorrow, under a pledge of the strictest secrecy! And still he complains that Thou art too severe with him, and is frightened by the difficulty; he bears about the heavy burden of his sins from year to year, from one Easter to the other; or, at all events, he does not make his confession honestly. Terrified by an imaginary difficulty, he conceals, through shame, a certain secret sin, and adds to his guilt and to the eternal punishment that awaits it by sacrilegious confessions and Communions. What could be more reckless or foolish than such conduct?

And should at once make use of such an easy means, and return to so good a God.

Come sinners, I conclude, in the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews, "Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace; that we may obtain mercy, and find grace;"[1] that is, let us approach the sacred tribunal of penance, and, without shame or fear, but with penitent hearts, confess our sins candidly. Let us imitate that notorious murderer in Spain. Augustus had published a reward of ten thousand crowns to him who should take the murderer living or dead. When Caracota (as the murderer was called) heard of this, he began to think of some plan of escaping the pursuit of such a powerful enemy. What did he do? He disguised himself, went to the emperor and humbly

[1] Adeamus ergo cum fiducia ad thronum gratiæ, ut misericordiam consequamur, et gratiam inveniamus.—Heb. iv. 16.

acknowledged all his crimes, trusting in his sovereign's goodness and in his own humble confession to obtain pardon. Nor was he disappointed, for the emperor not only forgave him, but also richly rewarded him. O sinner, what a terrible punishment has been decreed and published against you by the almighty God, from whose hands it is impossible to escape! All creatures are in readiness and await only a word from their Creator, to deliver you up to His vengeance, and if you are once arrested and brought before His judgment seat, there is no hope of your escaping the sentence of eternal condemnation. Therefore, while you still have time, you should fly to the throne of His mercy, and humbly confess your guilt, and promise amendment with sincerity, and you will find that you have to deal with a far more merciful Judge, than Augustus was towards the murderer. Do not complain that this voluntary confession is too hard for you. When the Prophet Eliseus told Naaman to go and wash seven times in the Jordan, in order to be cured of his leprosy, the latter was dissatisfied with the remedy proposed to him. But his servants said to him: "Father, if the prophet had bid thee to do some great thing, surely thou wouldst have done it; how much rather what he now hath said to thee: Wash and thou shalt be clean?"[1] Let you and me, O sinner, take those words to ourselves! If the Lord God had required of us to suffer the torments of hell till the last day, in order to obtain forgiveness of our sins, and to escape eternal fire, certainly we should submit to the condition with joy; much more, then, should we be ready to avail ourselves of the sacrament of penance, that easy means that He has prescribed for us, saying to us, go, and declare your sins only once to the priest, and they will all be forgiven you? For my part, O Lord, I can only stand amazed at Thy incomprehensible goodness and mercy, in pardoning so easily a miserable worm of the earth like me, who have so often and grievously offended Thee! No man on earth, if I had insulted him, would be willing to make friends with me again on such easy terms. And on account of this goodness of Thine, I now, with a heart full of sorrow and repentance, hate and detest all my sins; I submit to Thy sweet yoke; I will go and confess my sins candidly, as they are on my conscience, and for the remainder of my life I will love and praise above all things the Lord who has freed me by such an easy means from such a

[2] Pater, etsi rem grandem dixisset tibi propheta, certe facere debueras; quanto magis quia nunc dixit tibi: lavare, et mundaberis?—IV. Kings v. 13.

grievous evil, and has again received me into His friendship; and that I will do with full confidence that I shall one day love and bless Him forever in heaven. Amen.

SEVENTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE EFFICACY OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

Subject.

1. In the sacrament of penance the sinner receives back at once all he had lost by sin. 2. He receives more than he had lost, and becomes spiritually richer, than he ever was in the state of innocence.—*Preached on the eighth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Fodere non valeo, mendicare erubesco. Scio quid faciam.—Luke xvi. 3, 4.

"To dig I am not able, to beg I am ashamed. I know what I will do."

Introduction.

This unjust steward represents the sinner who by mortal sin is guilty of unfaithfulness to his Lord and his God, and squanders all the precious treasures and goods of his soul, so that he is reduced to the extremity of spiritual poverty, and can neither dig nor beg; that is, he cannot do anything meritorious of eternal life, either by his prayers and good works, or by the trials and crosses he has to suffer while in the state of sin, as I have elsewhere explained. Oh! if he were only so provident as that steward, who found a means of gaining friends for himself to whom he might apply for help in his poverty; and for that he was praised by his master, inasmuch as he had acted wisely. But many sinners will say, "What shall I do," in order to make good the losses I have sustained? I will give you the best possible advice; go like the steward, and call together your Master's debtors; that is, recall to mind all the sins you have committed, acknowledge them penitently in the sacred tribunal, and thus you will make good your losses; nay, you will become richer than you were before, and you will gain credit and praise with the almighty God for having acted wisely, as I shall show

to-day, in order to supply sinners with an additional motive for speedy repentance. The sacrament of penance is a necessary means for sinners; it is also a very easy means, as we have already seen; and it is, moreover, a most advantageous, efficacious means. Why? Because

Plan of Discourse.

In the sacrament of penance the sinner receives back at once all he had lost by sin, as I shall show in the first part. In the sacrament of penance he receives more than he had before, and becomes spiritually richer than ever he was in the state of innocence. That I shall prove in the second part. Therefore, sinner, delay no longer; decide at once, like the steward, and say, "I know what I will do;" I will immediately confess my sins.

O merciful God! give to all Thy grace that they may arrive at this conclusion; we ask it of Thee humbly, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

It is true that by confession we cannot make sin as if it never had been committed.

I have said on another occasion that we should not deplore too much the loss of a thing that cannot be recovered or replaced; for our sorrow in that case would be unavailing and useless For instance, the death of a dear friend is a sorrowful occurence; but why should I give way to immoderate grief on account of it? Can I bring back my departed friend, even if I wept tears of blood for him? Therefore, in such a case, prudence dictates to me that I should submit humbly to the decrees of Providence. It is done, and there is an end of it. Lord, may Thy holy will be done in all things! In the same way one might say to me, what is the use of my being sorry for my sins? Will all my contrition make them as if they had not been committed? There they are, and there they must remain. True; if I were to weep the ocean full of tears, I could not get rid of the fact that I have sinned. For all eternity it must remain true that I have despised my Sovereign God, and grievously offended Him. For all eternity Adam must acknowledge that he has transgressed the divine command, and brought misery on all his descendants; for all eternity Peter must acknowledge that he denied his Master most disgracefully three times; and Magdalene must confess that she was the greatest sinner of the place in which she lived. Yes, my dear brethren, in so far neither sorrow, nor resolution, nor confession, nor penance is of any good. But it is one thing to make a sin as if it never had been committed, and another, to make good the loss and damage caused by it. A

woman cannot recall her deceased son or husband to life by weeping for him; but if thereby she is enabled to bear her sorrow and desolation better, or to make good the loss she has suffered, then, indeed, she would have every right to weep as much as she likes.

Yet we can recover all we have lost by sin.

And that is what the sinner can effect by confessing his sins with proper sorrow; for thereby he can recover what he has lost, and that as completely and quickly as if he had never sinned. Ah sinners, think of what a fearful loss you suffer, in that unhappy moment when you commit a mortal sin, even if it is only in thought; and then you will have some idea of the great benefit to be derived from the sacrament of penance! You have lost, as far as in you lies, for all eternity, the supreme and infinite Good, God himself, and His favor and friendship; you have lost, and for all eternity, the life of your immortal soul; you have lost, and for all eternity, all the infused supernatural virtues and ornaments of your soul, with the exception of the virtues of faith and hope, unless you have sinned grievously against those virtues. You have lost, and for all eternity, the merits you had heaped up during your life by your good works and by the trials you bore; you have lost, and for all eternity, all right to the heavenly joys that were prepared for you; you have lost, and for all eternity, the rest, repose, and peace of your conscience. I will say nothing more now of the endless evil in which you have deliberately involved yourself. From this evil, as we have seen already, you can be freed, and can completely recover all you have lost, the very moment you make a good confession and receive sacramental absolution from the priest who sits in the sacred tribunal in the place of God.

The sinner recovers God, whom he had lost.

And first of all, you have again as your loving friend the God whom you had lost, and who, while you were in the unhappy state of sin, not merely refused to recognize you, but even pursued you with the bitterest hatred, and looked on you with disgust; and He loves you now as much, and is as favorable to you, as if you had preserved your baptismal innocence and had never done anything to offend Him. "He will turn again," says the Lord by the prophet Micheas, "and have mercy on us: He will put away our iniquities, and He will cast all our sins into the bottom of the sea."[1] A stone that is thrown into the depths of the sea is never seen again; and so, when sins, no

[1] Revertetur et miserebitur nostri: deponet iniquitates nostras, et projiciet in profundum maris omnia peccata nostra.—Mich. vii. 19.

matter how grievous they are, are once washed away in the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, they are buried and sunk forever out of the sight of God, as if they had never been committed. Nay, as a proof of His having completely forgiven them, the good God will not allow them to remain any longer in His memory. Hear the consoling words He speaks by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed . . . living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."[1] But how can that be? Can the Almighty forget what He once has known, or can His knowledge be changed? St. Thomas answers this question. There is one kind of forgetfulness, he says, by which one is unable to recall what he knew before, and this cannot be in God, who of necessity must know all things from eternity to eternity by an unchangeable knowledge. There is another kind of forgetfulness by which one gives no outward sign of what he knows, and acts as if it were altogether unknown to him; and it is in this sense that God is said to forget the sins of those who truly repent.[2] As far as their guilt is concerned, they are no longer remembered against the sinner; God shows him as much love and favor as if he had never been guilty of the least transgression; and if he who has been forgiven in the sacrament of penance should be so ungrateful as to fall again into the same mortal sins, those that he has got rid of by a good confession would never be held up against him, as far as their guilt is concerned; nay, if he is lost forever on account of the new sins he has committed, the former ones, for which he obtained forgiveness, would not be taken account of in his punishment. They are forgotten, and will remain so forever. And therefore the sinner is just as high in the favor and friendship of God, as if he had never committed a single mortal sin. O Christians, what a consolation for me and for all those who have sinned grievously!

The sanctifying grace, that was lost, and infused virtues are restored.

In the second place, you were bearing about in your body, while in the state of sin, a soul that was disgusting and abominable in the sight of God, according to His words to the Prophet Ezechiel, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die."[3] The beautiful life, that consists in sanctifying grace, is given back

[1] Si autem impius egerit pœnitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est . . . vita vivet et non morietur. Omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21-22.

[2] Et sic Deus dicitur oblivisci peccata eorum qui vere pœnitent.—St. Thom. in c. 16 Apoc.

[3] Anima, quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 4.

to you when you have received absolution in the sacrament of penance; and you are again clothed with the precious garment, which compels God to love you when He sees it on your soul, and which you must necessarily take with you into heaven, if you die in it. We have a figure of this in the Prodigal Son. When he returned to his father, full of repentance, and acknowledged his fault, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee," the father cried out at once, full of joy, "Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet . . . let us eat and make merry, because this my son was dead, and is come to life again: was lost and is found."[1] By the ring on the hand and the shoes on the feet, we are to understand the other ornament of the soul, that is, the different supernatural virtues that were infused in baptism, which follow and wait, like courtiers, on sanctifying grace as on their queen; these, too, are all restored to you in the sacrament of penance.

And all the merits previously gained.

Thirdly, you must know that all the merits of the good works you performed while in the state of grace are completely lost the moment you commit one mortal sin; and while you are in the state of sin, they are of no more use to you than a defaced coin that has no value any longer; so that, if you were to die in that unhappy state, you would not receive the least reward for all your good works, even if you had surpassed in holiness the Blessed Virgin herself. The sacrament of penance is that most fortunate transaction by which you can make good all those immense losses, and restore your former good works and merits to life again, so that you are just as rich in merits as you were before you committed a single mortal sin, and those merits, even down to the value of one "Our Father," will all be written down to your credit and to your eternal glory. And this is in accordance with the general teaching of theologians, and is partly founded on the promise made by God to the Prophet Joel. After the Lord had said: "Be converted to me with all your heart,"[2] He adds: "And I will restore to you the years which the locust and the bruchus, and the mildew, and the palmer-worm hath eaten;"[3] that is, I will restore to those who do penance all the fruits they collected while in the state of

[1] Pater, peccavi in cœlum, et coram te. . . Cito proferte stolam primam, et induite illum, et date annulum in manum ejus, et calceamenta in pedes ejus. . . manducemus et epulemur, quia hic filius meus mortuus erat, et revixit; perierat et inventus est.—Luke. xv. 21–24.

[2] Convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro.—Joel. ii. 12.

[3] Et reddam vobis annos, quos comedit locusta, bruchus, et rubigo, et eruca.—Ibid. 25.

grace, and which were eaten away by sin. In the same way, too, we must understand the words of the Prophet Jeremias, "Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted; renew our days as from the beginning;"[1] that is, the good we have done before we sinned shall be ours again, and all our former good days shall be reckoned to our credit.

The torment of a bad conscience shown by similes.

Finally, the sacrament of penance brings back to us the peace of mind and repose of conscience we had lost. Certain and infallible is the truth that the Holy Ghost has spoken by the Wise Ecclesiasticus: "A wicked heart shall be laden with sorrows."[2] Nor can it be otherwise. An honest man who has got into debt and is pressed by his creditors on all sides, but has not the means of paying them, must be necessarily troubled by many painful and uneasy thoughts; he has no rest, either day or night, and is always thinking of his debts; ah, he says to himself, would that I were able to pay off everything! Hardly does he dare to venture out into the street, lest he should meet one of his creditors. With good reason was it once said of a man who was deeply in debt, I should like to see the pillow on which that man can sleep at night; meaning thereby that it was impossible for such a one to enjoy his night's rest. But if some good fortune falls to his lot, if, for instance, he inherits a large sum that enables him to pay all his debts; what profound peace of heart he at once enjoys! The sick man who is suffering from an internal abscess can hardly bear the pain it causes him; every position he assumes causes him new torture; nor can any medicine help him until the abscess breaks, and he is freed from it altogether; then it seems to him that he has received a new life. What must be the thoughts of a malefactor who is lying in prison waiting for sentence of death to be passed on him? His imagination during the day, and, if he can sleep at all, his dreams during the night, are employed about nothing but gibbets and wheels, as if he were already suffering the tortures of a disgraceful death; if he hears the bolt stirring on the door of his prison, a cold sweat breaks out all over him; now, he thinks, they are coming to bring me to the gallows. I once saw a man who was told that he had to die. How the poor wretch raved and stormed! He seemed to me like a wild animal shut up in a room, clawing and leaping about the walls and windows trying to get out; he tore at his chains,

[1] Converte nos, Domine, ad te, et convertemur: innova dies nostros, sicut a principio.—Lament. v. 21.

[2] Cor nequam gravabitur in doloribus.—Ecclus. iii. 29.

in the hope of breaking them; he sprang up from the ground as if he would try to leap through the ceiling, and threw himself on the floor as if he wished to burrow through the stones and hide himself under them. What joy would not that poor wretch have felt, my dear brethren, if I had freed him from his chains, and opened the door of his prison, so that he might go free? But how much greater would not his joy have been, if I could have told him that his life was spared by his sovereign, and that he was at full liberty to go wherever he pleased?

The sinner had lost all peace of conscience.

Sinner, if you consider the matter in the proper light, you have reason to experience a much greater joy when you have made a good confession and have been absolved from your sins. While you were in the state of sin, you were a debtor to the almighty God, who had you completely in His power, and you owed Him as many millions as you had committed sins; for when you pray to the Lord, you say, "Forgive us our trespasses," or our debts. Nor had you a farthing in your possession to pay them; your own conscience was the importunate creditor, that kept constantly crying in your ear, "Pay what thou owest." How have you been able to find any rest while in such a state? You were suffering from an internal abscess, the pain of which must have taken away all pleasure from you, unless you were quite hardened; and, indeed, we read of St. Catharine of Siena that she was supernaturally enabled to perceive the foulness and stench of the ulcers of impurity on the souls of those who were addicted to that vice, and the sight and smell of them caused her the utmost disgust. How could you live in such a state? You were in prison, under the yoke of the devil, bound hand and foot, and the sentence of eternal death had been already passed on you; how could you continue in that state, without suffering constant fear and anxiety? Say what you will, it is impossible for you, unless you are a hardened sinner, to have rest or pleasure in it. The very stones must have pitied king David, if they could have heard him moaning, in the bitterness of his anguish, "There is no health in my flesh, because of Thy wrath; there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins."[1] So much did the debts he had contracted trouble him. "My sores are putrefied and corrupted, because of my foolishness."[2] And therefore, "I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I

[1] Non est sanitas in carne mea a facie iræ tuæ; non est pax ossibus meis a facie peccatorum meorum.—Ps. xxxvii. 4.

[2] Putruerunt et corruptæ sunt cicatrices meæ a facie insipientiæ meæ.—Ibid. 6.

walked sorrowful all the day long;"[1] so much pain did he feel from the hidden sore of his conscience. "I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart;"[2] so much was he tortured by his imprisonment and by the fear of eternal death. Other sinners have been known to take their own lives, either by hanging, or cutting their throats, or drowning themselves, and their only reason for doing so was to get rid of the tortures of conscience, which had become insupportable. "Who hath resisted Him, and hath had peace?"[3] Such is the question that the patient Job asks all sinners without exception. Nor is there one of them all that could say, I have done so.

This he gets back in confession.

Now, what is to be done by one who is in this miserable state, in order to regain the wished-for peace and repose? Answer us, O penitent David, for you have had experience of it; tell us how you acted in your trouble and anguish! "I said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord: and Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin;"[4] and thus I have again found peace of heart. It is by the confession of our sins, my dear brethren, that we receive the writing sealed with the precious Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that we have had all our debts remitted by the Almighty forever; by confession we get rid of the foul sore of sin; by confession our chains are broken, we are liberated from the slavery of the devil and restored to the freedom of the beloved children of God. Hence, as a matter of course, when the cause of our fear, anxiety, and trouble has been removed, our minds must enjoy a great peace and contentment. I call as witnesses to the truth of this all those who have been great sinners, and who have freed themselves from their sins by a good confession. How did you feel when you came out of the confessional, and had performed the penance imposed on you? Must you not acknowledge that it seemed as if a heavy mill-stone had been removed from your necks; and as if the heavens looked brighter than before? You went to sleep with hearts filled with joy and peace, and you got up in the morning with the sweet assurance that you were among the friends and children of God. It is evident, then, that, if one wishes to have true repose

[1] Miser factus sum, et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar.—Ps. xxxvii. 7.

[2] Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei.—Ibid. 9.

[3] Quis restitit ei, et pacem habuit?—Job. ix. 4.

[4] Dixi, confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino; et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

and enjoyment on earth, one must seek it in a good conscience.

Therefore penance is a very efficacious means.

Thus, O sinner, you have received back in the sacrament of penance everything without exception that you had lost by your sins. "O excellent virtue of penance! O salutary unction!"[1] cries out, with reason, St. Thomas of Villanova. O golden tears! O sweet repentance! O much-to-be-desired confession! Who should not hasten to thee with joy and pleasure! Come, O sinners, and try it but once, and learn what a happy and salutary thing it is to be freed from the burden of sin! Come, repent of and confess your sins, and you will receive back all the good things you have so shamefully lost. But why do I say you will receive back what you have lost? It will be with you as with the Hebrews when they were freed from the slavery of Egypt: "He brought them out with silver and gold,"[2] says the Psalmist David, which they took from the Egyptians by the command of God; so that they went away richer than when they came. So also, I say, it will be with the sinner in the sacrament of penance; not only will he get back all he had lost; but he will become richer in his soul than he ever was before; for he will have more graces and blessings after confession, than he ever had in the state of innocence. This I shall briefly explain in the

Second Part.

By confession the sinner is made spiritually richer than ever he was before.

And are we, then, to sin boldly in order to become richer in graces and merits after confession? By no means; that does not at all follow from what I have said. To sin, and to have been guilty of sin, brings neither grace nor merit; for, as we have seen already, it is the canker-worm that gnaws away all our merits and mortifies them; and, moreover, what is still worse, the good works we perform in the state of sin are of no value whatever as to eternal merit or reward. It is one thing to become richer by penance than one was before having sinned, and another to become richer than one would have been if one had never sinned. Therefore I say, by way of warning, to each and every one the words of the Prophet Jeremias: "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God."[3] But yet I say also, to the greater glory of the divine mercy and by way of encouragement to sinners, that they may repent more speedily, when sin has,

[1] O eximia pœnitentium virtus! O unctio salutaris!

[2] Eduxit eos cum auro et argento.—Ps. civ. 37.

[3] Scito, et vide quia malum et amarum est reliquisse te Dominum Deum tuum.—Jerem. ii. 19.

unfortunately, once been committed, it is penance and confession which bring back all that was gained before in the state of grace, and add a new gain to it. Hence we should at once resolve to make use of such an efficacious means, and to make a good confession of all our sins. And how can the repentant sinner become richer after confession, than he was before?

For he receives an increase of sanctifying grace.

First, along with the graces he had before, he receives by the efficacy of the sacrament, through the merits of Jesus Christ, a new degree of sanctifying grace which he never had before, so as to strengthen him against future temptations, and prevent him from falling again into sin. You see, therefore, that he has already gained by the sacrament of penance something he never had before. But perhaps you will think that is not much. Oh, I answer, in the words of our dear Lord to the Samaritan woman, "If thou didst know the gift of God."[1] If you only knew the value of this grace of which we are now speaking! Sanctifying grace is such a great and precious treasure, that the least degree of it is far more valuable than all the riches of the earth. All the wisdom, beauty, health, nobility, wealth, and power of all who ever were, are, or will be on earth, nay, all the excellences of the angelic nature, are not to be compared to the smallest point of sanctifying grace, which, when it clothes the soul, makes it pleasing to God; so that, if it were necessary, in order to gain the least part of this grace, that the world should be destroyed, the heavens convulsed and turned into chaos, and all the wonders of nature that the Almighty has created reduced to nothing, this loss, enormous as it would be, could not for a moment be compared with the worth of the grace thus gained. Because all those things are but natural, while sanctifying grace is supernatural, and, as St. Thomas teaches, is a participation of the divine nature. What do you think of it now? Is it only a small gain that is secured by penance? If it brought nothing else but this grace alone, it would be well worth our while to have frequent recourse to it, with hot tears of sorrow for our sins.

He becomes more humble and zealous in the service of God.

The second advantage to be derived from the sacrament of penance is that the sinner who has been guilty of grievous transgressions, when he has once been converted, and has repented of and confessed his sins, is, generally speaking, more on his guard in future and is more humble and earnest in the

[1] Si scires donum Dei.—John iv. 10.

divine service, than he was before, and has a greater love of God than when he was innocent. For the remembrance of his deplorable fall, and the thought that he so often merited the pains of hell, must necessarily make him humble; while the recollection of the divine mercy, that has received him so lovingly to grace after so many grievous sins, must soften his heart, inflame it with a greater love for so good a God, and with a determination to be more diligent in the service of God; while he will be more earnest in his efforts to avoid, not only mortal, but also even venial sin, than he was before to avoid mortal sin alone. That is the meaning of those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Luke, "I say to you that even so there shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance."[1] But how is that? is the question asked by theologians; has God more pleasure in a penitent soul than in an innocent one? and, in fact, more pleasure than in ninety-nine just souls that have never offended Him? The state of innocence, answers St. Thomas of Aquin, is in itself a more perfect and happy state, and is more pleasing to God; yet the penitent sinner is in so far more pleasing to God, "because, generally speaking, penitents become more cautious, humble, and fervent."[2] Never did Magdalene love Christ more tenderly, than when she repented of and confessed her manifold sins; never was Peter more humble and fervent in procuring the glory of his Divine Master, than after he had denied Him, and bewailed his denial with bitter tears.

And is therefore more loved and prized by God.

From this it follows that he who does penance sincerely is loved more tenderly by the almighty God. St. Gregory explains by a simile the words of Christ that I have just quoted; a general, he says, thinks more of a soldier who, having first fled from the enemy through fear, afterwards, in order to wipe out the memory of his cowardice, fights with the utmost bravery, than he does of one who has always remained faithful to his colors, but has never done anything remarkable. Again, a peasant takes more pleasure in the field that formerly produced nothing but thistles and thorns, but which he has now made to bring forth excellent crops, than in one that was always fruitful, although never in an extraordinary degree. In the same way God has frequently more pleasure and joy in a converted sinner, who had indeed formerly abandoned Him, but now stands by

[1] Dico vobis, quod ita gaudium erit in cœlo super uno peccatore pœnitentiam agente quam super nonaginta novem justis, qui non indigent pœnitentia.—Luke xv. 7.

[2] Quia plerumque pœnitentes cautiores, humiliores, et ferventiores resurgunt.

Him all the more heroically; who was before an accursed soil covered with weeds and brambles, but is now cleansed and produces excellent fruits of good works; greater joy, I say, has God in such a one than in an innocent, just man, who never offended Him grievously, and never showed any extraordinary zeal and earnestness in His service. Palladius tells us of a person who lived a solitary life in a convent, but having formed an attachment for a person of the opposite sex, was guilty of many sins against holy purity; that, after she had done penance, and had devoted herself altogether with the greatest humility to the service of the sick, Our Lord said to a certain priest, "She pleases Me better in her repentance, than she did in her virginity."[1]

And generally gets more graces from God than many innocent people.

Finally, as a consequence of this, since God loves more tenderly those who are more inflamed with love for Him, it is generally the case that, as the repentant sinner becomes more humble and zealous in the divine service, so he also receives more graces, favors, and benefits from God, than many others who never offended Him grievously and do not serve Him with so much zeal. For God acts very differently from the great ones of earth; if any one offends one of the latter, no matter how long or how humbly he asks for pardon, even if he obtains it through the intercession of some one in power, it will be a long time before he can expect to receive any special mark of favor from the offended person; "*Manet alta mente repostum:*" the great ones of earth are slow to forget an injury; nor can any amount of subsequent services wipe out the memory of it. "Is that the way with my God?" asks St. Peter Damian; "no: perish the thought: for it is His custom to honor penitents more than the innocent."[2] For when He has forgotten forever all the sinner's former offences He shows him the same favor as He does the innocent; and consequently, if the sinner loves and serves Him better, He is more loving and generous to him than to the innocent. Again the parable of the Prodigal furnishes us with a figure of this. On the return of his undutiful son, the father prepared a splendid banquet to welcome him, a thing he had never done for his other son, who had always been obedient to him, and who made it a subject of bitter complaint: "Behold, for so many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed

[1] Magis mihi placuit in pœnitentia, quam in virginitate.—Pallad. cap. 139.

[2] Numquid ita Deus meus? absit; consuevit enim honorare pœnitentes magis quam innocentes.

thy commandment, and yet thou hast never given me a kid to make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son is come, who hath devoured his substance with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."[1] Magdalene, formerly a public sinner, was the first among the holy women; Peter, who had denied his Master three times, was the first among the Apostles, according to the Holy Scriptures, to be honored by a visit from Our Lord after His resurrection; Paul became a great and wonderful saint, after he had persecuted the Church. Read the Lives of the Saints, and you will find many instances of penitent sinners being richer in the graces of prophecy and miracles than others who had never sinned grievously. I hope, on a future occasion, to speak of these more at length, to the greater honor and glory of the divine mercy.

Conclusion and exhortation to have recourse at once to such a useful means.

O Christians, what a good and merciful God we have to deal with! If a criminal who is already under the gallows thinks it the greatest happiness to hear that his life is spared, how would he not exult with joy if he learned, moreover, that he was to be raised to a throne? But a far greater happiness is given to us by the sacrament of penance; for not only are our lives spared, that we had forfeited eternally; not only do we get back all we had lost; but, besides, we become, by sanctifying grace, children of the almighty God, and heirs to an eternal kingdom; nay, we are higher in the favor of Our Lord than we were before. Is it possible, then, that there can be sinners who are afraid of confession? Who prefer to wallow like beasts in the filth of sin, rather than to sit on thrones of honor? Who prefer to die an unhappy death and go to hell, rather than gain endless treasures and riches by such an easy and efficacious means? Ah, rash mortals! how long will you, then, continue to rob your God of the joy He would have in your conversion, and yourselves of such a great good? "For Christ we beseech you," I say to you in the words of St. Paul, "be reconciled to God;"[2] do not wait any longer, but try at once and see how sweet and merciful the Lord is to those who have Him as a friend.

Consolation for converted sinners.

And you, converted sinners, who have already, by a good confession, laid aside the heavy burden of your sins, and are sometimes oppressed and filled with anxiety at the recollection of your former crimes; be consoled, be of good courage, and rejoice

[1] Ecce tot annis servio tibi, et nunquam mandatum tuum præterivi, et nunquam dedisti mihi hœdum ut cum amicis meis epularer; sed postquam filius tuus hic, qui devoravit substantiam suam cum meretricibus, venit; occidisti illi vitulum saginatum.—Luke xv. 29-30.

[2] Obsecramus pro Christo, reconciliamini Deo.—II. Cor. v. 20.

in the Lord! "The wickedness of the wicked shall not hurt him," such is the assurance the good God Himself gives you, "in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness."[1] No; you are now beloved and prized by God, and, if you wish, you may be even more loved and prized than if you had never sinned, as I have already shown. Let us all, then, come to this conclusion: to serve henceforth the good God, who, as we must acknowledge, has been so merciful to us, with more care, humility and zeal, and to love Him above all things, constantly, to the end of our lives. Yes, O my God, the special mercy Thou hast shown me deserves that I should make this resolution! Help me by Thy grace to keep it! Amen.

[1] Impietas impii non nocebit ei, in quacumque die conversus fuerit ab impietate sua.—Ezech. xxxiii. 12.

ON THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE BEFORE CONFESSION.

EIGHTEENTH SERMON.

ON THE PRAYER OF THE SINNER WHO IS ABOUT TO GO TO CONFESSION.

Subject.

The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility.—*Preached on the tenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Percutiebat pectus suum, dicens: Deus, propitius esto mihi peccatori.—Luke xviii. 13.

"He struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

Introduction.

What cannot humble prayer obtain from God? A great, public, and notorious sinner gains more by simply striking his breast, and heaving a penitent sigh, with the few words, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner," than the proud Pharisee with all his fasting, alms-deeds, and other good works. "I say to you," such is the testimony Our Lord gives on the matter, "this man went down into his house justified rather than the other." Sinful Christians, there you have a true pattern of a penitent! You must imitate the public sinner, if you are really determined to get rid of the filth of your sins by a good confession, and to return to God with your whole hearts. The examen of conscience, supernatural sorrow for your sins, an earnest and fixed purpose of amendment, the candid confession of all grievous sins to the priest, and the performance of the penance enjoined

on you: these, as you know, are all necessary to a good confession. But there is another thing that must precede them, or else it will be very difficult to perform them properly. What is that? Humble prayer to God for the grace of true repentance, as I shall now show.

Plan of Discourse.

The sinner who wishes to return to God by a good confession must pray to God with humility. Such is the whole subject of the present instruction. Therefore, sinners, pray with the publican, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Pray also, ye just, that you may preserve the grace of God. Such shall be the conclusion.

We all beg of Thee, O Lord, through the merits of Mary and of our holy guardian angels, to grant to sinners the grace of true repentance, and to the just the grace of perseverance.

No one can do any good work without a previous grace of God.

It is an article of faith taught by the Catholic Church against the error and heresy of Pelagius, that no one can do the least good work deserving of a supernatural reward, unless he is helped first by the grace of God, no matter what he may do with his own natural powers. This truth is founded on the words of Our Saviour in the Gospel of St. John, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine; so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. For without Me you can do nothing."[1] "Blessed be God!" cries out St. Augustine, "who in these words instructs the hearts of the humble," that they may not be exalted by their good works, but humbly ascribe every good thing that is in them to the grace and mercy of God; "and stops the mouths of the proud,"[2] who attribute everything to themselves and to their own strength, as if they required no help from any one. "Hear, ye proud ones," so he addresses the Pelagians; "have you understood those words? Christ, the Son of God, says: 'Without Me you can do nothing.' He does not say, 'without Me you can do only a little,' but, nothing, not even the least thing, can you do without Me."

Much less can the sinner do penance.

Now, if this is undoubtedly true of the just man who is in the state of grace and is a friend and child of God, how much less, then, can the sinner who has lost sanctifying grace do penance and recover the friendship of God by his own efforts, unless he is urged thereto and assisted by the grace and help of the mer-

[1] Sicut palmes non potest ferre fructum a semetipso, nisi manserit in vite; sic nec vos, nisi in me manseritis....Quia sine me nihil potestis facere.—John. xv. 4, 5.

[2] Corda instruit humilium; ora obstruit superborum.

ciful God? If, when I am standing upright and firmly on my feet, I cannot take a step forward without the divine assistance, how much more difficult must it not be for me to rise again without that assistance, when I have fallen down on the ground? No; neither of the two is possible; and therefore, according to the decree of the Council of Trent, "if any one says that a man can believe, hope, love, or repent properly, without the previous inspiration and assistance of the Holy Ghost. . . . let him be anathema."[1] Mark the words, "do penance properly." The traitor Judas did penance, as the Gospel says: "Judas . . . repenting himself, brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and ancients;"[2] full of sorrow, he confessed his sin. "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."[3] But his repentance was not of the right sort, and it did not obtain for him the forgiveness of his sin; it was a mere natural sorrow, that deprived him of all hopes of happiness, and reduced him to despair. "He departed, and went, and hanged himself with an halter."[4]

Man can sin by his own strength, but not rise again.

Thus we see that man can sin and grievously offend God by his own natural powers; but without the previous help and supernatural grace of God, he cannot rise properly from the state of sin. The reason of this is evident. I can, for instance, put out my own eyes, and make myself stone-blind; but can I restore my sight? No; that exceeds the powers of nature. I can throw myself from a height to the bottom of an abyss; but when I am lying down there, can I come out without help? That is impossible; my only chance is for some one to lower down a ladder or a rope, by which I may climb to the top. I can allow myself to be bound with an iron chain, or to be locked up in a dungeon; but can I loose the chain, or open the door of my prison, unless some one gives me a key for the purpose? I can take away my own life by violence; I can hang myself, or pierce my heart with a dagger (and would to God that there were not many rash mortals who thus put an end to themselves)! but when I have thus taken away my life, can I restore myself to life again? No; none but the almighty God can do that.

Because he takes away

It is just the same with the sinner, my dear brethren. What do you do, unhappy mortal, when you break the commandments

[1] Si quis dixerit, sine præveniente Spiritus Sancti inspiratione atque adjutorio hominem credere, sperare, diligere, aut pœnitere posse, sicut oportet . . . anathema sit.

[2] Pœnitentia ductus retulit triginta argenteos principibus sacerdotum et senioribus.—Matt. xxvii. 3.

[3] Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Ibid. 4. [4] Abiens laqueo se suspendit.—Ibid. 5.

of God by committing a mortal sin? You deliberately put out your own eyes, and deprive yourself of the light of your soul. Hear what the Prophet Sophonias says: "They shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord."[1] They will stumble from one fault into another, as St. Jerome says on this text; they will fall from one sin into another, when they have lost grace, and have become blind and perverse in their judgment and understanding, so that, for a momentary satisfaction of their wicked and brutal appetites, they are ready to sacrifice the eternal joys of heaven, and to change them for the torments of hell. And how can you recover your sight? Who can restore it to you? No other but He of whom the holy Evangelist St. John says: "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world."[2] He it is who wishes to be appealed to in the words of the blind man, "Lord, that I may see."[3] Hear how St. Augustine, in his soliloquy with God, describes how he was healed of his former spiritual blindness: "Late have I known Thee, O true light."[4] A thick cloud of vanity had obscured my sight, so that I could not see the Sun of justice and the Light of truth; I was wandering about, an unhappy child in the midst of darkness. I was pleased with my blindness, because I knew not the light. I was blind and loved my blindness, and wandered from one obscurity into another. "Who led me forth? Who took me by the hand to rescue me? Who was it that restored me to sight? It was Thou, O Lord my God, who art full of mercy and forgiveness."[5] I sought Thee not, and Thou didst seek me. Thou hast called out from on high to my heart, in a clear and penetrating voice, let there be light; and there was light. The dark cloud that was blinding me disappeared, I saw Thy light, heard Thy voice, and said: "Truly, Thou art my God, who hast called me out of the darkness and the shadow of death into Thy wonderful light; and behold, I see."[6] "Thanks to Thee, who hast enlightened me."[7] "I should have been always blind, if it were not for Thee. For there is no light but in Thee."[8] "I thank Thee for

by sin the light that God alone can restore

[1] Ambulabunt ut cæci, quia Domino peccaverunt.—Soph. i. 17.

[2] Erat lux vera, quæ illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.—John i. 9.

[3] Domine, ut videam.—Luke xviii. 41.

[4] O lumen verum, sero te cognovi.—St. Aug. Soliloq., c. 33.

[5] Quis inde me eduxit? Quis accepit manum meam, ut inde me educeret? Qui est ille illuminator meus? Tues, Domine Deus meus, misericors et miserator.

[6] Vere Domine tu es Deus meus, qui eduxisti me de tenebris, et umbra mortis, et vocasti me in admirabile lumen tuum: et ecce video. [7] Gratias tibi, illuminator meus.

[8] Quia illuminari non poteram sine te, et non est lux extra te.

having enlightened and redeemed me."[1] So far St. Augustine.

He has cast himself into an abyss from which God alone can free him.

And what have you done besides, unhappy mortal, when you sinned grievously? You deliberately cast yourself down into the depths of the abyss, of which the wise Man says in the Proverbs, "The wicked man, when he is come into the depth of sins, contemneth."[2] And how are you to come forth out of that abyss? Ah, to no purpose would you strive; you would be lost and buried forever, if God did not stretch forth His hand to you and help you by His grace. "The deep hath closed me round about," such is the lamentation of the disobedient Jonas, "the sea hath covered my head; I went down to the lowest parts of the mountains; the bars of the earth have shut me up forever."[3] What are you to do, unfortunate Prophet? to whom will you fly? "Thou wilt bring up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God;"[4] such was his confident appeal to heaven. It is Thou, and Thou alone, who canst draw me out of this abyss. Like to this is the sigh that I hear king David utter: "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord."[5] Unhappy man, that I am; where am I? Into what a fearful abyss I have cast myself! From these depths, out of which I cannot help myself by my own strength, I sigh and weep, and call out to Thee, O Lord, "Lord, hear my voice."[6] Nor will I cease crying, until Thou hast heard me. There is no hope for you, O sinner, but in the help of the Lord!

He has bound himself with chains which only God can loose.

Besides, you have fettered yourself in this abyss with so many chains, and have shut the door so fast on yourself, that you have made it almost impossible for you to come out; as the penitent David again deplores: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me,"[7] so that, even if I wished, I could not free myself. To break these chains, to open the door of this prison, is in Thy power alone, who sayest in the Apocalypse: "I have the keys of death and of hell,"[8] and who hast said to Thy Apostle, Peter, "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."[9] "And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in

[1] Gratias tibi ago, illuminator et liberator meus.

[2] Impius, cum in profundum venerit peccatorum, contemnit.—Prov. xviii. 3.

[3] Abyssus vallavit me, pelagus operuit caput meum; ad extrema montium descendi; terræ vectes concluserunt me in æternum.—Jonas ii. 6, 7.

[4] Sublevabis de corruptione vitam meam, Domine Deus meus.—Ibid.

[5] De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine.—Ps. cxxix. 1.

[6] Domine, exaudi vocem meam.—Ibid. 2.

[7] Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.—Ibid. cxviii. 61.

[8] Habeo claves mortis et inferni.—Apoc. i. 18.

[9] Tibi dabo claves regni cœlorum.—Matt. xvi. 19.

heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven."[1]

Like St. Peter in prison.

The mention of St. Peter's name reminds me of a strange thing that occurred to him; he was lying in prison at midnight, bound with heavy chains, and guarded by two soldiers, and was to be led out to execution on the following morning; under these circumstances he slept as peacefully as if he had not the least danger to fear. "Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and the keepers before the door kept the prison."[2] But, Peter, is this a time for sleep? The executioner has his sword ready, and he will soon come to take your life; and yet you sleep as quietly, laden with your heavy chains, as if you were in a comfortable bed! A striking picture, my dear brethren, of the sinner who, laden with his crimes, as with so many chains, lies bound under the yoke of the devil, and must expect at any moment to hear that he is to be led out to eternal death; and yet he sleeps while in that state, he eats and drinks, and talks and laughs, as if he had nothing to fear. What lamentable blindness and stupidity! But to return to Peter; what happened to him? "Behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him; and a light shined in the room; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly. And the chains fell off from his hands."[3] And the angel led him through the soldiers out of the prison. Again a striking picture of what occurs when the sinner returns to God. If the angel had not awaked Peter, he would have slept on; and even if he had awoke of his own accord, he would not have been able to free himself from prison. In the same way, there is no one whose soul is fettered by mortal sin who could even think of repenting, unless the light of grace first shone on him; and if he formed a thousand wishes to be converted and do penance, he would not be able to fulfil one of them by his natural powers alone, unless the angel of the Lord, that is God's powerful grace, first burst his chains and freed him from the slavery of the devil.

Shown by a simile.

St. Anselm once met in the street a child who, to amuse itself, had tied a string around the feet of a sparrow, so that, when the bird flew up into the air, seeking its liberty, the child could

[1] Et quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit ligatum et in cœlis: et quodcumque solveris super terram, erit solutum et in cœlis.—Matt. xvi. 19.

[2] In ipsa nocte erat Petrus dormiens inter duos milites, vinctus catenis duabus, et custodes ante ostium custodiebant carcerem.—Acts xii. 6.

[3] Ecce, angelus Domini astitit, et lumen refulsit in habitaculo; percussoque latere Petri excitavit eum, dicens: surge velociter. Et ceciderunt catenæ de manibus ejus.—Ibid. 7.

pull it back; this the child did several times to its great amusement. The holy man saw what was going on, and felt great pity for the unfortunate bird; ah! he said, I wish the string would break, so that the bird might fly away. At last the thread did break, and the bird escaped, whereupon the child commenced to cry bitterly, while Anselm, on the contrary, was highly delighted. His companions were amazed that such a great man, and an archbishop to boot, could take such interest in mere child's play, as to give evident signs of its exciting in him both joy and sorrow. But he said to them, were you looking at what the child was doing with the bird? Do you know what I was thinking about? That this is just the way in which the devil plays with many men; for when he has bound them fast in his chains, he drags them down at pleasure into one sin after the other; and there is many a one who is given to impurity, injustice, drunkenness, cursing, and swearing that knows the unhappy state in which he is, and sometimes cries out, ah, would that I could free myself from this evil habit! He is then like the sparrow, and tries to fly into the air; but the devil, by means of long-continued habit, drags him back again into his former sins of drunkenness, theft, or impurity. In a word, he will not be set at liberty, until a special grace of God bursts his bonds; and then he can joyfully sing, with the penitent David: "Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us to be a prey to their teeth. Our soul hath been delivered as a sparrow out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and we are delivered. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth,"[1] without whose help we and all poor sinners should still be in the clutches of the devil.

He has murdered his soul, and God alone can restore it to life.

Finally, unhappy mortal, when you commit a mortal sin, you cruelly murder yourself, inasmuch as you take away the life of your poor soul. "I am straitened on every side," said the chaste Susanna, when she fell into the hands of the godless elders; "for if I do this thing it is death to me;" if I consent to your wishes, I shall have to suffer death; "and if I do it not, I shall not escape your hands."[2] What dost thou say, Susanna? "It is death to me." No; the contrary is the case. If you consent to the will of those wicked men, your life will be spared; but if

[1] Benedictus Dominus qui non dedit nos in captionem dentibus eorum. Anima nostra sicut passer erepta est de laqueo venantium; laqueus contritus est, et nos liberati sumus. Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini, qui fecit cœlum et terram.—Ps. cxxiii. 6-8.

[2] Angustiæ sunt mihi undique; si enim hoc egero, mors mihi est; si autem non egero, non effugiam manus vestras.—Dan. xiii. 22.

you do not consent, they have threatened to accuse you as an adulteress, that you may be stoned to death. No; said the wise and holy woman; if I do as they ask me, and commit sin, it will be the death of my soul, "But it is better for me to fall into your hands without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."[1] I would rather die a thousand times, than sin before the Lord, and thereby inflict eternal death on my soul. Mark, O sinner; your soul is dead; who will, who can recall it to life again? Ah, that is not in your own power. That requires the almighty power of God. If He by His grace does not call you forth, like another Lazarus, from the grave of sin, you are and must remain dead forever. There is no other means for you to regain life, but the help of God.

Hence he who commits sin acts foolishly.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he who is guilty of grievous sin is most presumptuous; for he deliberately places himself in a state from which it is impossible for him to free himself, in order to save his soul, by his own unassisted efforts. For, on the one hand, when God is forsaken by man, He is not bound to give him the grace of true repentance; and, on the other hand, no man can repent sincerely without that grace. Hence St. Thomas of Aquin, answering the question whether it is just that he who commits but one mortal sin, which may consist in a mere momentary desire wilfully entertained, should be punished by the fire of hell for all eternity, says that it certainly is a just and righteous punishment; and in addition to other reasons, which I will explain on some future occasion, he gives this one for his answer: namely, that man, when he sins, commits the sin forever, and, as far as he can, makes the resolution to remain in sin for eternity;[2] and therefore it is right that his punishment should be eternal. But how can that be? Nearly all who sin, unless they have become quite desperate, intend doing penance afterwards, and freeing themselves from the state of sin. True; but whence has a man the assurance that he will be able to do penance? According to the Angelic Doctor, he places himself in a state from which he cannot be freed, unless by the divine assistance,"[3] and God is not bound to give him that assistance. To explain his meaning, the same holy Doctor makes use of the simile of the man who wilfully casts himself down into an abyss. If you know, he says, that you cannot possibly come out again,

[1] Sed melius est mihi absque opere incidere in manus vestras, quam peccare in conspectu Domini.—Dan. xiii. 23.

[2] Quia homo in suo eterno peccavit.

[3] Ponit se in statu a quo erui non potest, nisi divinitus adjutus.

unless some one brings you a ladder, can it not be said of you, with truth, that your intention was to remain there during your life? There is not the least doubt of it; although you may have said to yourself that you would wait for some passer-by to help you. For how do you know that the man will come, or that he will help you? You act just as foolishly and presumptuously when you cast yourself into the deep abyss of mortal sin.

Shown by an example by way of simile.

Some peasants once revolted at Antioch, and threw down the statues of the emperor, for which crime the judge sentenced them to a cruel death; but, as St. John Chrysostom relates, a wise old man stood up and calmed the judge's anger with these few words: "it is true that the statues were thrown down, but they have been put up again."[1] A great crime has certainly been committed against the emperor; but his statues are now in the same position they occupied before. But if you put to death human beings, who are made to the image of God, "how will you be able to restore them to life again?"[2] How will you be able to raise up that which is thrown down, and to bring the dead back to life? A very sensible argument, indeed! Would that all men made use of it in matters which concern their spiritual welfare! All worldly goods, O Christians, are merely perishable earthen statues, which can be replaced if they happen to be lost or destroyed; but that most beautiful image of the Blessed Trinity, which is impressed on your soul, if it is once destroyed by sin, how can it be restored again? It is infallibly true that you are not able to restore it by your own efforts. Therefore consider well what you are about, and say with Susanna it is far better for me to die a thousand times, than to drag my soul down to eternal death by even one mortal sin.

Secondly, he who defers penance runs a great risk.

It follows, in the second place, that the sinner acts most rashly towards his poor soul, when he defers repentance, although he has received good inspirations, thoughts, and graces from the good God, to induce him to amend his life. For he does not know whether he will ever again be offered the help that God now offers him. It is the same as if he said: I know, O Lord, that Thou wilt now restore my sight, and that if Thou dost not do so, I shall be in darkness forever; but I do not wish to see the light as yet; if Thou offerest it to me at some other time, I will accept it. Thou stretchest out Thy beneficent hand to help me out of the depths of the abyss, into which I have wilfully

[1] Statuæ quidem dejectæ sunt; rursum tamen erectæ fuerunt.—St. Chrysos. Hom. 17 ad pop.

[2] Quomodo rursum poteritis commissum revocare.

cast myself, but Thou mayest go away now; I prefer to remain here a little longer; hereafter, when it suits me better, Thou canst return and help me out. Thou art willing to break the chains that keep me bound in the slavery of the devil; but I do not wish to be set at liberty now; hereafter, when I shall have changed my mind, Thou mayest do what Thou art willing to do now. Thou desirest to free my soul now from eternal death; but I do not wish to live at present; at some future time Thou canst render me that service, and help me to arise from the grave. Ah, presumptuous mortal! how can you dare to entertain such thoughts? "To-day, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts."[1] Now, at this moment, if you hear the voice of God calling to you, do not close your ears, but accept the proffered grace, for it may never be offered you again.

Lastly, the sinner must humbly beg of God the grace to repent.

Finally, the truth I have undertaken to prove follows, namely, that he who is in the state of sin must humbly beg of God the grace of true repentance and conversion, so that what he is unable to do by his own natural powers may become possible to him by the help of divine grace. It is true that, as I have often said before, the merciful God is always ready and willing to give to the sinner who earnestly wishes to repent the necessary grace to enable him to do so, and He has assured us of that with an oath by the Prophet Ezechiel: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."[2] Mark the desire that the Lord has to help all sinners; so great is it, that He calls it His life, as it were. If a man does anything very willingly it is said to be his life; thus, eating and drinking is his life; hunting is his life; study is his life, etc., and the meaning of that is, that the man finds his greatest pleasure in those occupations. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way." My greatest pleasure, My life, is to help him and show him mercy. That I say, is quite true; but God does not force His help and grace on any one who does not wish to receive them. He desires to be asked for them; "ask, and you shall receive,"[3] He says. Sometimes the Lord knocks uninvited at the door of our hearts; He gives the sinner powerful inspirations and graces to urge him to repent, so that his heart is filled to overflowing with contrition

[1] Hodie, si vocem ejus audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra.—Ps. xciv. 8.

[2] Vivo ego, dicit Dominus Deus, nolo mortem impii, sed ut convertatur impius a via sua, et vivat.—Ezech. xxxiii. 11.

[3] Petite et accipietis.—John. xvi. 24.

and sorrow, although he never asked those graces from God, and was actually continuing to commit sin, without the least thought of repentance. Such is the experience of many who happen by chance to read a spiritual book they have picked up somewhere, or to hear a sermon, when mere curiosity, if not a worse motive, has induced them to go to church. But these cases are, so to speak, miracles and wonders of the divine mercy; and it would be great presumption to expect anything of the kind in one's own case. As a general rule, God gives His grace to those who are prepared to receive it; the first grace is usually a salutary thought and desire of the sinner to be converted; from this desire springs the impulse to pray humbly to God for the grace of true repentance; but if that prayer is neglected, the other graces are withheld, and frequently they are never offered the sinner again.

Conclusion and exhortation to sinners to pray humbly for the grace of repentance.

Therefore, pray, O sinners, pray humbly and fervently, like the publican in to-day's Gospel, knowing that you cannot do anything of yourselves, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Pray, not only in the ordinary way, before confession, that you may know the number of your sins; but, what is more important, pray for true contrition and sorrow, that you may return to God with all your heart. And you especially, obdurate sinners, who have neither wish nor desire to do penance, and who think it impossible to give up your sinful habits and to amend your lives, do not allow yourselves to get into such a desperate state that you forget prayer altogether. Send up your sighs to heaven, and cry out daily with the blind man, "Lord, that I may see." Stupidly and blindly have I been wandering for a long time on the way to eternal darkness; and I have no one in the whole world to show me the way to heaven, but Thee, O true Light of my soul! Lord, I beg humbly for this light, that I may see, and know the danger of the state in which I am; that I may see and know the grievous malice and deformity of my sins; that I may see and know what a great and infinite God I have insulted and offended, what a great and infinite good I have lost forever, and that I may at once repent with my whole heart. Cry out, with the penitent David, "Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord: Lord hear my voice;" I am lying at the bottom of an abyss from which I cannot save myself, unless Thou stretchest forth Thy hand to help me." "Let Thy ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication."[1] Say, with the same David: "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me;"

[1] Fiant aures tuæ intendentes in vocem deprecationis meæ.—Ps. cxxix. 2.

I wish, O Lord, that I could fly up to Thee! But I cannot; Thou must help me! Send Thy holy angel to fill my heart with trouble and anguish, until my chains are broken and I regain the freedom of Thy beloved children! With the patient Job, look towards your Redeemer and cry out to Him for help: save me, O Lord, for my soul is dead and putrefying in the filth of sin; restore it to life. In the boundless treasury of Thy graces, Thou surely hast one that is powerful enough to soften my hard heart, and to breathe the breath of life into my soul. Be merciful to me, a sinner, that I may not die impenitent! So you should pray if you are still in the state of sin and feel no desire to repent; and you should also be diligent in hearing sermons, for the good God is specially generous with His graces when the faithful are assembled to hear His word.

To the just to pray to be kept from sin.

And you, just souls, learn from what has been said to be truly humble of heart. Do not imagine that, if you have been hitherto free from mortal sin, or have committed less sin than others, that this is to be ascribed to your own natural strength. The same God, whose grace is necessary to enable the sinner to do penance, must also help us not to fall into sin. All of us, without exception, must pray daily, "lead us not into temptation," that is, help us, O Lord, that we may not be separated from Thee and Thy friendship by any temptation; keep us from those occasions and allurements in which Thou foreseest that our weakness would lead us into sin. Think and say often, with humility and thankfulness, if Thou, O Lord, hadst not preserved me in so many dangerous occasions of sin, if Thou hadst not borne me in Thy hands by Thy powerful grace, into how many grievous sins might I not have fallen? And therefore I say, with Thy servant Augustine, "I attribute it to Thy mercy and grace that Thou hast freed me from my sins, and that I have avoided whatever evil I have not committed."[1] Nor will I cease, as long as I live, to implore Thy grace and mercy, for I am in the greatest need of them, weak mortal that I am, every moment of my life, to avoid falling into sin, and I will pray with Thy holy Church, "May Thy grace, O Lord, always prevent and follow us, and grant that we may be always intent on good works, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord."[2]

[1] Gratiæ tuæ deputo et misericordiæ, quod peccata mea solvisti; gratiæ tuæ deputo et quæcunque non feci mala.

[2] Tua, nos quæsumus, Domine, gratia semper præveniat et sequatur, ac in bonis operibus jugiter præstet esse intentos, per Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum.

NINETEENTH SERMON.

ON THE NATURE OF THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

He who wishes to make a good confession, must, 1. examine his conscience himself, and, 2. must examine it with proper diligence and care.—*Preached on the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Surdos fecit audire, et mutos loqui.—Mark vii. 37.

"He hath made both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak."

Introduction.

What a multitude of deaf and dumb there are in our days in the Christian world! For, my dear brethren, sinners are often deaf, and will not hear anything of repenting of and confessing their sins; and they are often dumb and do not confess their sins at all, or else do not confess them properly. Almighty God, Thou art the only One who canst make the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak; ah, pierce, we beg of Thee, by Thy powerful inspirations and graces the hearts of all sinners, that they may now open their ears, and loosen their tongues, that they have wilfully made dumb, to confess their sins as they ought, that they may be freed from them. This is the request that I again, in the name of God, make of all sinners: return to God now at least; do penance and confess your sins: but as we have seen in the last sermon, first you must humbly beg of God to give you the grace of true repentance. I continue my explanation of the different requisites that are necessary for a good confession. After the light of the Holy Ghost has been implored by fervent prayer, the next thing is the examen of conscience, or the effort to find out what sins we have committed. The defect of this requisite is the cause that many a confession is not made properly. I shall now explain the nature of this examination.

Plan of Discourse.

He who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience himself; such will be briefly the first part. He who wishes to make a good confession must examine his conscience

with proper diligence and care; such will be the second and longer part.

That all this may be done, we beg Thy light and grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels, so that all sinners may sing Thy praises with gratitude, and acknowledge that Thou hast made the deaf to hear, etc.

The nature of the sacrament of penance requires that the penitent should first examine his conscience.

In the first place, then, it is necessary that he who wishes to make a good confession should examine his conscience himself; and that is required by the nature and properties of the sacrament of penance, which has been instituted by Our Lord as a kind of judgment. In civil courts of justice, no one is questioned unless he has been caught in the act of committing a crime, or has been accused by some one else; otherwise the accused need not confess his guilt, nay, he can deny it unless it is proved against him. It is quite different with the sacrament of penance; the criminal must accuse himself, without being questioned, or put to the torture, or having his crime proved against him; and of his own free will he must make known his own secret and hitherto unknown evil deeds. He is at the same time a poor sinner, his own accuser, and the witness against himself; and the judge who is sitting there in the place of the almighty God has to pronounce sentence only on what the penitent accuses himself of. But how can a man accuse himself, when he does not know what he has been guilty of? And how can he know that unless he has thought of, and examined into, and remembered what he has done against the law of God? From this it is evident that they act very wrongly and foolishly who rush into the confessional without any preparation, trusting solely to the questions of the confessor. Would it not be a foolish thing for you to accuse a man in judgment, and to say to the judge, this man has committed a great crime; you must ask me what he has done? What could you expect as the result of an accusation of that kind? Still more unreasonable is your conduct when you go to confession and say to the priest, Father, I have sinned; please question me. You yourself must declare in what and how often you have sinned. The priest is not sitting there to ask you questions, but to hear what you have to say against yourself. He is not sitting there to accuse you, but to judge you according to the sins you confess to him, and, if you are worthy, to give you absolution from them.

Unless he is incapable of so doing.

It may sometimes occur that through weakness, or illness, or stupidity, or simplicity, one cannot undertake the examen of conscience, or knows not how to set about it; in a case of that kind charity obliges the confessor to help his penitent as far as possible and to supply for his incapacity by asking him questions. But God does not require much in the way of examination from people of the kind; and therefore theologians say that it is enough for an ignorant, uneducated man, who cannot recollect anything particular, to excite himself to sorrow for all his past sins, and to be prepared, when he enters the confessional, to answer all the questions put to him by the confessor, and to declare honestly what has been his condition, occupation, and mode of life hitherto. But when a man has common sense enough in matters relating to his family, or business concerns, and can remember the good or the evil that others have done him, if he were to pretend ignorance or forgetfulness in what concerns the all-important business of his soul, and to say, I cannot remember anything, Father, please question me: such conduct, as St. Bernard says, would be nothing but carelessness with regard to knowing his sins;[1] and therefore he would not fulfil the commandment of God that St. Paul makes known to us in the words, "Let a man prove himself,"[2] and examine his own conscience.

He who does not examine his conscience, but depends on the questions of his confessor, runs the risk of making a bad confession.

Besides, it is a well-known and undoubted necessity that one should confess all his sins (that is to say, all his mortal sins that have not yet been properly confessed), declaring their number, along with the circumstances that notably aggravate their guilt, or at least those circumstances that change their nature; and if even one of them is omitted through culpable ignorance or wilful negligence, the confession and the absolution are null and void. But how can you reasonably expect to escape the danger of making an invalid confession, if you do not examine your conscience, but leave the whole matter to your confessor? Must he guess what you have done against the commandments of God, and how often and how grievously you have sinned? Do you wish to act like King Nabuchodonosor, who expected his sooth-sayers to tell him what he had dreamt? "I have dreamed a dream" he said to them, "and am troubled in mind and know not what I dreamed . . . therefore tell me the dream and the interpretation thereof."[3] A ridiculous thing

[1] Sciendi incuria. [2] Probet autem seipsum homo.—I. Cor. xi. 28.

[3] Vidi somnium, et mente confusus ignoro quid viderim . . . somnium igitur, et interpretationem ejus, indicate mihi.—Dan. ii. 2, 6.

certainly for the king to ask, and therefore the sooth-sayers said to him: "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will declare the interpretation of it."[1] You must first tell us what you have seen in your dream; for it is not our duty to find out that, and then we will explain to you what it signifies.

Because the confessor cannot know the penitent's mode of life.

I have sinned, you say to your confessor; Father, please question me. And what is he to question you about? How does he know what you have done? Has he seen your thoughts during the week, month, quarter, or half year that has elapsed since your last confession? Has he heard all you have said during that time at home and in company? Has he been here, there, and everywhere with you, like the omnipresent God Himself? Generally speaking, he does not even know who you are; he has never been in company with you, and perhaps has never seen you before; he knows nothing of your secret desires and inclinations, nothing of the occasions, temptations, and allurements to sin in which you may have been; nothing of your good or evil habits; nothing of those with whom you associate, nor of your business or occupation, etc. Now, all these circumstances may be the occasion of different vices and sins, and they must be examined and inquired into according to the number and gravity of the sins committed. For it is not enough merely to go through the commandments of God and of the Church; but each one has to pay particular attention to his state and occupation, because, generally speaking, there is a difference between the sins committed by married people and those who are unmarried; by masters and mistresses, and by servants; by officials and superiors, and by subjects and inferiors; by merchants and shop-keepers, and by tradesmen and laborers; by citizens in the town, and by peasants in the country, etc. For the different states of life have their separate duties and obligations, and their separate dangers and occasions of sin. But how can one who knows nothing whatever of your affairs guess at, or find out by questions, what you have in the depths of your conscience? You have quite enough to do to find out all about it yourself, and to get a clear idea of what you have done against God and your neighbor in thought, desire, word, and deed; is not that so? How, then, can you imagine that you will be able, when your confessor asks you one or two questions, to remember at

[1] Rex somnium dicat servis suis, et interpretationem illius indicabimus.—Dan. ii.

once all those circumstances of place, time, opportunity, and company, so as to answer the questions properly, and say with certainty, yes, I have done that; no, I have not done that; I have committed that sin so and so often, etc.? Even if you are asked a hundred questions, and have given a hundred answers, how can you trust to those answers, which must be very uncertain, for the validity of the absolution you expect to receive? Are you not thus running the risk of nullifying the holy sacrament of penance, and dishonoring it by a grievous sacrilege? If you leave out a mortal sin, and it is hardly to be expected that you should not under the circumstances, whose fault is it? Your own; because you did not examine your conscience as you should have done; and your ignorance is the result of a culpable negligence, which will not excuse you before God. Therefore one should examine his conscience before confession; and, as the forgiveness of sin depends on it, this examination must not be made lightly and in a superficial manner, but with due care and diligence. This we shall see in the

Second Part.

A simile to explain the amount of diligence required.

A judge who has been commissioned by his sovereign to try a certain individual who has been accused of a crime does not fulfil his duty by merely examining the matter cursorily; for such carelessness on his part would show that he does not wish to find out the guilty person. It is not, however, easy to decide the exact amount of diligence that he must employ; all we can say is that it must be a reasonable diligence, such as is suited to the nature of the crime, to the place in which it was committed, to the time required for investigating the matter, and to the expenses that have to be incurred; and further, it must be such as will seem sufficient to any sensible man who understands the matter. For instance, a murder has been committed in a town, and some persons were witnesses of it; now he who has to examine into the affair goes about the streets and asks every one whom he happens to meet if he has not heard who is the guilty person. There are some who say they know nothing about it, while others profess to know all about it. But he does not make any further inquiries. Do you think he has done his duty? No, certainly not; no sensible man would say that he had. Why so? Because he should have first sent for those who were present at the murder and have questioned them as witnesses. Again, if he knows who the criminal is, he sends an

officer of the law to apprehend him; the officer goes to his house and looks for him in the room he usually occupies, but not finding him there, goes away and makes no further search. Do you think, my dear brethren, that enough diligence has been used to bring the murderer to justice? No; there is not the least doubt that the judge has neglected his duty. And what should he have done? He should have caused the gates of the town to be closed, so as to prevent the criminal from escaping; and then he should have gone with soldiers, and have searched every corner of the criminal's house, and also of every house in the neighborhood where he could have suspected him of hiding; and that search should be continued for some days. If, in spite of all these efforts, the judge does not succeed in finding the murderer, then every sensible man must say that, at all events, he has done his duty, and that he could not have been expected to employ greater diligence. But why? He might have spent months in searching out every corner in the whole town; and then, certainly, he would have taken more trouble in fulfilling his duty. True the trouble would have been greater; but there was no reason for his taking it, since the crime of one man is not a sufficient reason for keeping the gates of the town closed for such a long time, nor for going to the expense of searching every house, and that, too, to the great inconvenience of the people. Due proportion being observed, the same is to be said of the examination of conscience before confession. No general rule can be laid down with regard to the amount of time and care that are to be employed therein, for penitents differ in their conditions and capabilities, and some require more time and care than others. According to circumstances each one must employ what can be called, in the general acceptation of the term, a reasonable diligence. The Council of Trent says distinctly that diligence should be used in the examen of conscience; "all mortal sins that one finds on his conscience after a diligent examination must be declared in confession."[1] And farther on, speaking of the obligation of confessing all mortal sins, it says, "which occur to the memory after due and diligent reflection."[2] But the Council does not say what particular amount of time or diligence is required.

[1] Oportere omnia peccata mortalia, quorum post diligentem sui discussionem conscientiam habent, in confessione recenseri.—Trid., sess. xiv., c. 4.

[2] Quorum memoria cum debita et diligenti præmeditatione habeatur.—Can. 7.

The length of time to be employed shown by another simile.

The safest rule to follow, and one generally prescribed by theologians, is, for one to employ as much time and diligence, according to his state of life, as all sensible people would employ in any other matter of great importance. To make this clearer, I will explain it by a simile. You have an important account to render in which there is question of a large sum of money; if you give in your accounts every week or fortnight regularly, the matter is easy enough, and does not require much trouble on your part; all you have to do, is to look at your account-book, and you will see it all at a glance. But if it is many months, or even years, since you squared up your reckoning, and if, moreover, you have allowed things to get into disorder through carelessness, or if you have otherwise been prevented from keeping your books properly, and if, at the same time, the master who demands the account is a very exact and careful man, while you yourself must acknowledge that all your interests are completely in his hands, how would you act? Would you think an hour or even a whole day too much to spend in putting the matter into order? My opinion is that whole weeks and months would hardly seem long enough to you; and meanwhile you would give up all other business, and would tell your servant not to allow any one to interrupt you. In a word, you would strain all your powers of memory and understanding to set matters right, especially if your master kept on urging you, in the words of the rich man in the Gospel, "give an account of thy stewardship."[1] So it is with you, O sinner, when you are preparing for confession. You are about to undertake a great business on which the happiness of your soul for all eternity depends, and if you make a grievous and culpable error in your accounts, you will certainly be ruined. Is this matter perhaps of less importance to you than your temporal and transitory prosperity? Are not worldly goods worth less than nothing when compared to the treasures of your immortal soul? He who demands the account from you is the great God Himself; is He, perhaps, less experienced in His own affairs, less exacting in His claims, less just and powerful in His punishments, than a mere mortal? Hear what He says of Himself by the Psalmist. "The searcher of hearts and reins is God."[2] "I will search Jerusalem with lamps,"[3] He says by the Prophet Sophonias; so

[1] Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.
[2] Scrutans corda et renes Deus.—Ps. vii. 10.
[3] Scrutabor Jerusalem in lucernis.—Soph. i. 12.

exact is He. Our Lord, exhorting us not to fear man, but God alone, says of Him that He "can destroy both body and soul into hell,"[1] so powerful is He. This is the Lord who calls out to you, when you are about to confess your sins, "give an account of thy stewardship;" give an account of how you have spent your time hitherto, of the use you have made of the powers of your soul and of the senses of your body; of how you have fulfilled the obligations of your state of life; of what you have thought, spoken, done, and omitted; of what you have gained, and of what you have squandered. Give an account of how it has been with your conscience during the past. What must you do, O man; how have you to set to work?

Those who live piously and confess often can and should make their examen short.

Are your accounts clear, correct, and in good order? (I am speaking now of those Christians who, although they have often sinned grievously in the past, yet have made a good confession, and are now trying with all possible care to serve God, so that, at all events, they do not commit deliberate mortal sin, examine their consciences every evening before retiring, and go to confession every week, or fortnight) are your accounts, I say, in good order? If so, then you need not be afraid. You need not spend much time, nor be too scrupulous in examining your conscience before confession; if you happen to commit a mortal sin, there is no danger of your forgetting it. As to venial sins, you are not bound to tell them in confession; so that, even if you forget them by the thousand, or deliberately refuse to mention them, that does not interfere with the validity of your confession; all you have to do is to mention some sin of your past life, for which you can excite yourself to sorrow, and your confession is valid, your account is approved of by the almighty God, who signs it by giving you the grace of the sacrament. There are many who make a great mistake and cause themselves unnecessary anxiety by the useless trouble they take in the examination of their consciences, so that they turn the confessional into a rack to torture their souls, and make the sweet burden of Jesus Christ insupportable. These people, although they cannot remember having committed any mortal sin since their last confession (and they go regularly and frequently during the month), yet spend half and even whole hours sometimes thinking of what they will say; so that, when the day for confession comes they have no time to hear a sermon, or to do any other good work. They spend the whole morning, almost, in preparing for confession; they pry

[1] Qui potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam.—Matt. x. 28.

into all their thoughts, words, and actions; they make sins where there is no sin at all, and they doubt about everything; perhaps, they say, full of fear and anguish, I have sinned by that thought, by that word I let drop. They have a hundred perhapses, one after the other, and there is not the least foundation for one of them, while, the more they try to examine their consciences, the more disturbed they become; and at last they are obliged to acknowledge that, after having spent hours in all sorts of distractions and fancies, they are just as wise as before, and have not learned anything about the state of their consciences.

That they may not omit a great deal of other good works.

And what have they been doing all the time? To speak plainly, they have been frittering away their precious time to no purpose; and if they have nothing else to accuse themselves of, they might well mention that in confession. Sometimes, by their over-anxiety, they lose an opportunity of hearing a sermon, which might do them good their whole lives long (on one occasion only Thomas was not present when his divine Master visited the Apostles; oh, what a great loss he suffered thereby! If he had been present with the others, he would not have sinned by incredulity), or they lose holy Mass, or hear it without attention or devotion, and thus lose an opportunity of receiving many graces and merits. The most useful, necessary, and excellent preparation for confession is a lively faith, a great hope and confidence in God, a true sorrow for sin, a firm purpose of amendment, a careful examination and selection of the means and manner in which one may lead a better life, lessen one's daily faults, serve God with more zeal, do more good works, and have more will to do them. That is what most of the time should be spent in. But it is what they think of least of all; or else they make themselves incapable of it by their long and scrupulous examen of conscience, and when, after a great deal of trouble, they have learned off by heart some doubts suggested by their scruples and a few daily faults that they knew as well before as after the examen, then they strike their breasts a few times, make an act of contrition mechanically out of their prayer-book, and think that now everything is in proper order, their accounts with God are settled, and away they rush into the confessional. In olden times God commanded Moses to place a number of looking-glasses around the foot of the laver that was used in the tabernacle: and they were to be women's looking-glasses, too, that is, the clearest of all: "He made also the laver

of brass, with the foot thereof of the mirrors of the women."[1] The Lord wished those mirrors to be quite clean, so that the priests, when washing, could observe the least speck of dirt. What would we have said if we could have seen one of those priests covered with dirt, and spending a long time looking at himself in the glass, but not doing anything to clean himself, and at last going away in the same state in which he came? We should certainly have thought that the priest was not in his right senses. And we may form the same opinion of those who spend a long time in contemplating and considering their daily faults, which are the spots that soil their souls, but take little or no trouble to wash them away by being truly sorry for them. True contrition for sin, and a firm purpose to amend our lives and to lessen the number of our sins, should and must be our chief occupation before confession. Another evil effect of that too protracted examination of conscience is this, that the mind gets so wearied and fatigued, that there is very little devotion in the preparation for and thanksgiving after holy Communion, which should otherwise be the proper time to unite one's self with God, and to amass rich treasures of grace. You see now what they gain by their scrupulosity. It is sheer nonsense, I say, and I repeat what many holy and learned men have said before me, that they who conscientiously try to avoid all grievous sin, or who go to confession every week or fortnight, especially when, besides that, they are in the habit of making the evening examen of conscience, take far too much time, and act unreasonably, if they spend half an hour, or even a full quarter of an hour, in the examen before confession. Cabrena says distinctly that they should not spend longer than it takes to say the psalm "Miserere;" and if the persons are scrupulous, they should not take even that long. If you have committed a fully deliberate venial sin, confess it if you wish, and have done with it; if you do not remember any sin, then you can confess your daily faults, into which you usually fall; but you can recollect them better while you are going to church, than by making them the subject of a scrupulous examen; and, as we have seen already, you should mention some sin of your former life that is known to your confessor, and awaken a heartfelt sorrow for it and renew your resolution against it. In that way you can employ your time far more profitably in the service of God, than by losing it in a useless examen of conscience.

[1] Fecit et labrum æneum cum basi sua de speculis mulierum.—Exod. xxxviii.8.

The contrary is required of grievous and inveterate sinners.

Ah! some will say, that is just what I want! If the time it takes to say a "Miserere" is long enough for the examen, then I have managed matters very well hitherto; I do not care to bother my head with long discussions of conscience before confession. But softly, friend; who are you who make that boast? Are you one of those of whom I have just spoken? If such be the case you are right enough, go on as you are going. But are you one of those whose accounts are not in order? I am speaking now of those tepid Christians, who sin by wholesale and lead careless lives, who pay little attention to their souls, go to confession one, two, three, or four times a year, and meanwhile commit sin whenever the occasion offers, without much hesitation; allow full liberty to eyes, ears, tongues, hands, thoughts, and desires; seldom or never examine their consciences; easily forget their sins, and the number and circumstances of them; or, if they go to confession every month, commit sins that are of a peculiarly dangerous character, and are likely to be the occasion of more sin; such as a long-continued habit of this or that vice, in which they show no signs of amendment from one confession to another; sins of injustice, scandal, detraction, vindictiveness, and enmity; habitual drunkenness; continual dissensions between married people or neighbors, all of which can be the occasion of many sins to others; an impure attachment to a certain person, which places one in the proximate occasion of sin, and gives rise to thousands of sinful thoughts, desires, words, and deeds, by day and night. Are you, I say, one of those people? If so, then it alters the question altogether. You and such as you require a far longer time and much more care and diligence in examining your conscience before confession, in order to satisfy your obligation and to square your accounts with God. Would you think a whole day too much to spend in bringing such an account as yours into order? But what do I say? A day? You will not even spend an hour in it; you sit in the church for a quarter of an hour or so, and go through the commandments of God in a kind of a way, go into the confessional when your turn comes, rattle off a dozen mortal sins more or less, and then expect to get absolution. How is it possible for you, in such a short time, to have a clear knowledge of the many sins you have committed in thought, word, and deed? But if you have forgotten some and do not tell them, do you think that your forgetfulness will excuse you before your Judge? I for my part do not think so, for your own laziness is in fault, and your confession and repentance

are worth nothing. Therefore you must spend more time in the examen of conscience, and must employ an amount of diligence proportionate to your state and occupation and to the nature of your sins.

How these latter must examine themselves.

How is that to be done? God Himself tells us by the Prophet Jeremias: "He shall sit solitary and hold his peace, because he hath taken it up upon himself."[1] That is, he will sit in solitude and silence, because he has raised himself in thought above himself. Mark the words, "he shall sit solitary." You have, namely, to sit in judgment on yourself. When we think of our sins, self-love often makes us try to excuse them instead of condemning them, so that we absolve ourselves before the priest gives us absolution, and endeavor to lessen the actual malice and gravity of our sins, attributing them to weakness or forgetfulness, or blaming others for them; and therefore we do not excite ourselves to proper sorrow for them. In the examen of conscience one must not act the part of advocate and patron for himself, but rather that of a just judge, who honestly and thoroughly examines the matter as it is in itself. "He shall sit solitary;" that is, you must put away all other cares and occupations, and be as if you were quite alone in the world with God, and had nothing else to do but to render Him the account of your conscience. "And hold his peace," that is, you must reduce to silence your evil inclinations, which will try to persuade you, by all sorts of false arguments, that this or that is not a sin, or at least not a grievous sin, a danger to be guarded against especially in things to which we are greatly attached; for in such matters we do not, as a rule, examine ourselves very strictly; we mention them only in a general way in confession, and, if we are in doubt, do not ask, lest we should have to give up something we are fond of doing, or do something we have a dislike for. We act like those sick persons who do not allow the doctor to know anything of the hidden cancer or ulcer they are suffering from, lest they should have to bear the pain of having it cut or burnt out. But more of this on a future occasion. "Because he hath taken it up upon himself:" finally, you must take up the yoke and raise yourself above yourself, by examining accurately into all you have been doing in the past.

And sweep out their consciences like David.

The penitent David brings forward another simile on this subject: "And I meditated in the night with my own heart," he

[1] Sedebit solitarius et tacebit, quia levavit super se.—Lament. iii. 28.

says, "and I was exercised and I swept my spirit."[1] What do you do when you wish to sweep out your room, so as to have it perfectly clean? You go through every corner of it; you put all the chairs and tables to one side, and move the furniture, so that no dust may remain concealed behind it. So must you act, sinner, if you wish to do sincere penance; enter the chamber of your conscience; seek out all its hidden recesses; examine, as far as you can, all your thoughts, desires, words, and actions, to see if you can detect a mortal sin in any of them. Move all the chairs and tables; that is, consider the habits, business, and occupations that engage your attention from morning till night, the places and houses you frequent, the company you keep, the obligations of your state and how you have fulfilled them, so as to see whether and how often you have sinned against God and your neighbor, and what effects, injury, or scandal have followed from those sins, which you foresaw and could easily have prevented. If, on account of a long-continued habit of a certain vice, or the occasions in which you are placed, you cannot find out the exact number of times you have sinned, then try to recollect how long you have been addicted to that vice, and how often you fell into sin probably during the day. Above all, as we have seen in the last sermon, call upon God for light and help; say, with the penitent David: "Who can understand sins?"[2] I have sinned, O Lord; I have sinned grievously; I have sinned often; but how can I find out the number and nature of my sins, unless Thou comest to the assistance of my memory? "O my God, enlighten my darkness."[3] Thou hast numbered all my steps, and hast written down all the movements of my heart; enlighten, then, my understanding, that I may know all my sins, repent of them, confess them properly, and not commit them again. In that way you will make a good examen before confession, and even if a mortal sin should escape your memory, or you cannot say the exact number of times you have sinned, your forgetfulness will then be inculpable, and will not be attributed to you, so that you will be validly absolved from all your sins.

Repentance for previous faults in this respect and

O my Lord and my God, would that I had always acted in that way! I must confess my great carelessness in this respect. Perhaps some of my confessions are written down in Thy book as

[1] Meditatus sum nocte cum corde meo, et exercitabar, et scopebam spiritum meum.—Ps. lxxvi. 7.

[2] Delicta quis intelligit?—Ibid. xviii. 13.

[3] Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas.—Ibid. xvii. 29.

invalid, and Thou wilt bring them up against me hereafter. Merciful God, pardon me the sins I have left out in confession! If I knew them now, I should willingly confess them with the utmost exactness. I repent of each and every one of them with my whole heart, because I have thereby offended and despised Thee, my God, who art worthy of all love. Henceforward I will sit in judgment on myself with more care and diligence, and, that I may not have to spend a long time in examining my conscience, I will watch more carefully over all my actions, I will go to confession frequently, at least every fortnight, make my examen every evening before retiring to rest, and, above all, be on my guard against ever offending Thee by a wilful and deliberate mortal sin; so that on the day of judgment I may be able to present my account in good order, and show that it has been properly signed by Thee in all my confessions. Give me Thy grace to this end, O God of Goodness! Amen. purpose of amendment.

TWENTIETH SERMON.

ON CANDOR IN THE EXAMEN OF CONSCIENCE.

Subject.

1. Some, when examining their consciences, make themselves out to be more guilty than they really are. 2. Many make themselves out to be more innocent than they really are. Both are wanting in candor towards their souls.—*Preached on the twelfth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Viso illo præterivit.—Luke x. 31.
"Seeing him, passed by."

Introduction.

To come at once to my subject. As the priest and the Levite acted in the parable of to-day's Gospel, so do many sinners act nowadays when they wish to purify in the sacrament of penance their souls, which are represented by the poor traveller who fell into the hands of robbers. That poor man could not heal himself; he had to trust to the charity of another; but the sinner must heal himself in the sacrament of penance with the help of God. Yet, I repeat, he acts sometimes like the hard-

hearted priest in the Gospel, who, "seeing him, passed by," and went on his way, without doing anything for the unfortunate man who was lying half dead and covered with wounds. It is especially when examining their consciences that sinners are guilty of imitating the conduct of the priest; they look at their consciences in a superficial manner, and pass over many mortal wounds, which they do not discover nor bring to light; and that because, as we have seen in the last sermon, they do not employ sufficient care and diligence. But there is another fault which is the occasion of many sins being passed over, namely, the want of candor in the examen of conscience.

Plan of Discourse.

In this way a fault is committed through excess by those who, in the examen, look on themselves as more guilty than they really are: those I shall deal with in the first part. A still more grievous fault is committed through defect by those who look on themselves as more innocent than they really are. These latter I shall deal with in the second part of to-day's instruction.

Enlighten us by Thy grace, O God, that we may correct both faults; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of our holy guardian angels.

The examen of conscience must be candid. Explained by a simile.

In a court of justice both the judge and the accuser must be on their guard against calumniating the accused. They must not impute to him, through falsehood and malice, a crime of which he is innocent; nor must they accuse him on mere suspicion and without sufficient proof; nor have recourse to false arguments to make a minor crime appear greater than it is, and deserving of death. For if mere suspicion, envy, falsehood, and malice were allowed to influence a judge, then every honest man might be arrested as a malefactor. The same care, candor, and honesty must be used in the examination of our consciences before confession; for the sinner is then his own accuser. You must therefore be on your guard, O sinner, against wronging yourself, or accusing yourself falsely of sin, through fear, anxiety, unfounded doubts, or mere suspicion; nor must you make great sins of small ones, nor certain of doubtful ones, lest you should accuse yourself to your judge of crimes of which you are not guilty. "I was exercised, and I swept my spirit,"[1] says David of himself, as we have seen in the last sermon. Mark the word, "swept," my dear brethren; it means in the Hebrew, "I looked

[1] Exercitabar, et scopebam spiritum meum.—Ps. lxxvi. 7.

at myself," and its signification here is, "I looked at myself in my spirit." This simile is admirably suited to our subject; for when you are trying to recollect your sins, says St. Augustine, your conscience must resemble a mirror, which represents all objects that are held before it as neither greater, nor smaller, nor more beautiful, nor more ugly than they are in themselves. There are mirrors so made as to represent the object in different colors, although the latter may be snow-white; mirrors that are cut in such a way as to multiply the object, so that, when one looks into them, he sees himself twenty, thirty, or fifty times; mirrors that make the object much greater than it really is, so that, when you look at yourself in them, you appear to be a monster, your head is like a giant's, your eyebrows are like trees, your eyes like two large globes; in a word, they make you appear a monster, although you are not in reality a whit altered in stature. It seems to me that many, especially pious and conscientious Christians, stand before mirrors of that kind when they are making the examen of conscience before confession: their consciences are of such a nature that they make what is good appear bad, what is small, great, and what is only one, they multiply indefinitely in number.

They err who consider as sinful what they do through inculpable ignorance.

And, firstly, there are those who, when they have done anything, no matter what, without the least thought or suspicion of sin, and hear afterwards, in a sermon or elsewhere, that it is unlawful, become at once troubled and anxious. Alas, they say to themselves, what have I been doing all this time? And I never even confessed it. What am I to do? Thus they at once condemn themselves of sin, although they are perfectly innocent, and consider themselves bound to declare it in their next confession. But what are you thinking of? You are guilty of calumniating and detracting yourself; for, even if what you did were the greatest sin in the world, you did it through inculpable ignorance, since you had no suspicion at the time that it was unlawful; and therefore you are not guilty, because what is done with a good conscience cannot be afterwards made bad by any subsequent knowledge one gains regarding it. Therefore it is not matter for confession. But if you are nevertheless bent on accusing yourself of it, which is quite unnecessary, and is a waste of precious time, then, at least, you ought to add (and you are bound in conscience to add) that you did it with a good conscience, so that the judge, who is sitting there in the place of the almighty God, may not look on you as guilty of a sin of

which you are innocent, and may not be deceived in his judgment about you by yourself.

And also they who, through anxiety, imagine themselves to be guilty of sins of which they are innocent.

Again, there are scrupulous people who are incapable of forming a sound opinion in those matters concerning which they are scrupulous. If, when preparing for confession, they look over the ten commandments, or the table of sins in their prayer-books, they think they are guilty of every one of them, although there is not the least foundation for a supposition of the kind; and, brooding over their fancied guilt, they fix it firmly in their imagination, until at last they look on it as an undoubted fact. A certain priest of our Society once told me that he had to do elsewhere with a penitent of that kind, who was utterly unknown to him, and who spent quite an hour in the confessional telling the most horrible sins, amongst which were witchcraft, and sorcery, and hatred of God. "A cold perspiration," said the priest, "began to pour down my forehead, my hair stood on end with horror, and I was in a most frightful state of uncertainty as to how I was to deal with a penitent of that kind, and to dispose him to sincere sorrow for his sins, when, after a long time spent in questioning him, I found that the whole thing was mere imagination and the result of groundless anxieties, so that my only difficulty then was to find in that most innocent soul sufficient matter for sacramental absolution."

Those who make mortal out of venial sins.

The third class consists of those who make mountains out of mole-hills, and mortal sins out of venial, certainties out of doubts, and even vices out of virtues. They look on all impure thoughts that come into their heads, even against their will, as so many mortal sins; every thought against faith, although they reject it at once, they put down immediately as a sin of heresy; a want of confidence in God they consider blasphemy; a suspicion against their neighbor, as a rash judgment, and every feeling of vexation in their daily crosses, as impatience and despair. The more they brood over those things, the more do they become persuaded that they are guilty; and as there is no counting the thoughts that come into their heads, so it seems to them that their sins are beyond numbering; like people who blind themselves by looking too long at the sun, they make themselves almost incapable of looking at the matter in a reasonable light. Scrupulous people of that kind, since they cannot form a sound judgment of their own actions, must spend a very short time in the examen of conscience, and, according to the general teaching of theologians, should never accuse themselves of

mortal sin, unless they are infallibly certain, without any previous examen of conscience, that they have really committed a wilful, deliberate, grievous sin; nay, so certain must they be of their guilt, that they must be prepared to swear to it, if necessary, before God and the priest. If they refuse to do that, all the mortal sins they accuse themselves of are mere imagination. Therefore, whenever a doubt occurs to them as to whether they have done this or that, or consented to bad thoughts or not, they can and must, without further examination, at once conclude they are no guilty, and reject all their anxious doubts as mere nonsense, because the devil seeks, by means of those doubts, to disturb their minds and to prevent them from having real devotion. There is only one cure for such scrupulous people, and that is, that they always go to the one confessor, who must be an experienced man, and obey his directions blindly and humbly; if they refuse to do that there is no help for them in their misery. So much for those who, through excessive anxiety, make themselves out to be more guilty than they really are. But I fear that the number of the other class of penitents is much greater, namely, of those who, through carelessness of their salvation, when examining their consciences, look on themselves as more innocent than they really are in the sight of God, and thereby run the risk of never making a good confession, and so expose their souls to the greatest danger. These latter require a longer instruction and exhortation; and we shall devote to them the

Second Part.

Others make light of really grievous sins.

Just as there are mirrors which make small things appear great, and beautiful things ugly, so there are others made in such a way as to cause things that are really large to appear quite small, nor is the error in the thing itself, but in the glass which represents it, just as, when you look through the wrong end of a telescope, high mountains seem to be small hills, and lofty towers, mere pillars. Again, no matter how good and true a mirror is in itself, if you go too close to it, so as to breathe on it, you will darken it so that you will not be able to see anything. The consciences of many sinners, when they are preparing for confession, are like those mirrors; they look on grievous sins as venial, and on venial sins as no sins at all. They approach too close, so that they see their sins only darkly; that is, they argue too much with their consciences, seeking all

sorts of pretexts to excuse themselves from certain sins, until at last they persuade themselves that there is no harm in them.

They are, first, those who think nothing of bad thoughts and desires.

And they are, first, those sinners whose consciences are callous, so that they do not feel the sins they commit, unless they do something very bad in outward act. These people examine themselves only on the actions they do against the commandments; they make nothing of thoughts and desires, of secret pleasure, of looks and words, and do not even count them as sins, although in reality they may be grievously sinful, especially in the matter of impurity, or hatred and revenge, even before any outward act is committed. But such people trouble themselves little about that. As long as they cannot satisfy their bad desires, either through want of the opportunity which they sought for, or because they have changed their intention, they consider that they are free from sin; or else, if they do take notice of such thoughts, they seek to excuse themselves by saying that they had no bad intention. But what a lame excuse that is! To entertain impure thoughts for instance, deliberately, and wilfully to adhere to them, if only for an instant, knowing them to be evil, is already a mortal sin, no matter whether there is or is not the intention of doing an unlawful action. This is the undoubted teaching of all theologians.

Who excuse and do not examine sins to which they are attached.

There are others whose evil inclinations and desires blindfold their consciences, so that they now and then cannot see or acknowledge their sins and the malice of them; and this is especially the case in sins of habit, or in vices to which they are much attached. For instance, a man thinks of nothing all the day long but how he may make some temporal profit, so as to become rich; he does not trouble himself to ask whether the means he makes use of to that end are lawful or not; as long as he can make the profit, he is satisfied. Another centres his thoughts altogether on pleasure; he is always trying to satisfy his sensuality, and he takes it for granted that whatever helps him to this end is lawful enough; he frequents all sorts of company without the least scruple; he laughs, jokes, and amuses himself with persons of the opposite sex, whenever opportunity offers, and he allows full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and tongue. Now in all this there is evidently danger of sins of all kinds; nay, humanly speaking, it must be that he offends God in different ways. I will say nothing of the sins that are committed by those who have an impure attachment for each other. Nevertheless, when it comes to the examen of con-

science before confession, those people close their eyes to all these sins; they do not look into the mirror properly, lest they should awaken the worm of conscience, and be disturbed in their pleasures by its gnawings; they resemble those parents and heads of families who connive at the faults of their children and servants, and excuse themselves by saying that they do not wish to disturb the peace of the household.

That they may not be obliged to abstain from them. Shown by a simile.

A little boy is sent to school to learn to read; the schoolmaster speaks to him in a friendly manner, and begins to teach him the ABC. Look here, my boy, he says, this letter is A; now say it after me, A. The child looks at him and says nothing. Come now, you are not dumb, continues the teacher, you surely can pronounce the letter? But the little fellow remains obstinately silent. The teacher then shows him all the fine pictures he will give him if he is a good boy; but to no purpose. At last he takes down the rod and holds it up before him. Come, he threatens, if you do not say the letter at once, I shall have to punish you. But neither kindness nor threats can induce the little boy to say a single letter. After school the other children ask him why he was so stubborn. Oh, he answers, if I said A, I should have to say B and C, and so it would go on, until I should have to learn grammar, syntax, and all the rest of it; and there would be nothing but study for me for the next six, seven, or eight years; therefore I thought it better not to begin at all, and so put an end in time to all the bother. That is the way with those so-called penitents; they will not say A, lest they should have to say B. If I begin, they think, with this matter, and examine myself carefully on it, I shall find out a great many things that I have hitherto taken no notice of, my peace of mind will be gone, and I shall have to speak of them in confession; perhaps my confessor will look on them as mortal sins, and if he does, I shall have to give up what I have been so long accustomed to, and to make a change in my mode of life that will not at all suit me. It is better therefore to put a stop to the matter at the very outset; and after all, there is nothing so very bad in those things; I never really looked on them as grievous. Then they go to confession and tell other faults and sins, which they find not much difficulty in avoiding; but they say nothing about those which excited their anxiety. When they have done that three or four times, they begin to believe in earnest that there is nothing wrong in those actions. But how badly they will fare when the

divine Judge Himself will examine their consciences and probe their hearts to the very depths!

Those who think that what others do cannot be wrong.

The third class consists of those who, as it were, hang up a curtain before their consciences, that they may not see and have to acknowledge themselves guilty of certain sins. A doubt, and that, too, not always an unfounded one, occurs to them sometimes, as to whether their mode of life, of dress, of behavior in company, is quite in accordance with the law of Jesus Christ or not; and then the custom of the world comes in most conveniently as a curtain with which to hide the whole affair, so as to keep their conscience quiet about it. "They that fear the Lord," says the wise Ecclesiasticus, "shall find just judgment, and shall kindle justice as a light. A sinful man shall flee reproof, and will find an excuse according to his will;"[1] that is, according to the commentators, he will try to excuse what he wishes to excuse. But what excuse will he find? Will he try to compare himself to just and pious men? No; for their lives would condemn his. He compares himself rather with those who resemble himself, and who follow the vain customs of the world. The Gospel of Christ calls out to him often, and so do the holy Fathers with the doctrine they have left behind them, and preachers and confessors with their exhortations and instructions; even his own uneasy conscience calls out to him also, if he will only hear it, this or that is not lawful; it goes directly against the principles of the Gospel of Christ. And what answer does he make? Oh, he says, others do the same; it is the custom of the world! This or that confessor does not look on it as a sin; other confessors say nothing whatever about it; there can be no great harm in it therefore. Thus they throw a veil over their consciences and, when examining themselves before confession, do not even think of looking into those matters, and they go with many others along the road which worldly vanity, in direct opposition to the Christian law, has made for them. But, you who act in this manner, wait till you come to the end of that road; you will find that it leads to where many like you have gone already. The door by which the chosen children of God enter heaven is, you must know, very small and narrow; many, indeed, are called to enter thereat, but few will be admitted; "few there are that find it."[2] When your Judge shall demand

[1] Qui timent Dominum, invenient judicium justum, et justitias quasi lumen accendent. Peccator homo vitabit correptionem, et secundum voluntatem suam inveniet comparationem.—Ecclus. xxxii. 20, 21.

[2] Pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam.— Matt. vii. 14.

a strict account from you, bring forward your excuse, "others did the same; it was the common custom in the world," and see what it will profit you. The question will then be, not what others have done, but what you yourself have done; not how others have lived, but how you yourself should have lived with others. "Thou shalt not follow the multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou yield in judgment to the opinion of the most part, to stray from the truth."[1] Will you, then, lose your soul for the sake of others, who also lose theirs?

They who do not examine themselves on the duties of their state.

There is another class of penitents who do not find out all their sins when preparing for confession, because they look only at one half of themselves in the glass, like one who holds a mirror so that he can see into it with only one eye; thus the half of his face is hidden from him, nor has he any idea of what it is like. They first examine how they have offended God in thought, word, or deed, since their last confession; but they never think of seeing how they have fulfilled the duties and obligations of their state of life, so that they often leave out grievous sins, which they could and should have known. A pious and zealous priest, hearing once the confession of a great emperor, said to him: "I have now heard the sins of Charles; let me hear those of the emperor also." The same might be said to many when they are examining their conscience before confession.

Such as superiors.

I have thought of my sins, says some superior, magistrate, or official. What do you mean? You have thought of the sins of the man; but you must also think of those of the superior, and see how you have fulfilled the duties of your position; whether you have done justice to all, protected poor widows and orphans, punished notorious vices, and abolished abuses, as you are bound to do according to your office; whether you have always striven for the honor of God and the good of the community; whether you have trampled on human respect and spoken when you were bound to speak; whether you have ever revealed what you were bound to keep secret. These and similar matters also belong to the examen of conscience and to the tribunal of penance.

Lawyers.

I have thought of my sins, says the lawyer. Very well; but you must also examine how you have performed the duties of your profession. Have you encouraged your clients to useless and unjust litigation, in order to make money out of them? Have you protracted unnecessarily a suit that you could have

[1] Non sequeris turbam ad faciendum malum, nec in judicio plurimorum acquiesces sententiæ, ut a vero devies.—Exod. xxiii. 2.

settled at once with a few words of good advice? Have you accepted bribes from your opponent to the damage of your client's interests; or, when a bribe was not offered you, have you taken no interest in his just case? Have you undertaken so many cases that you could not devote proper attention to any of them, or have you advised the parties to compromise after having known for certain that one of them had lost his case? Have you the knowledge and capacity requisite to your profession? All these things, as well as the question of making restitution for the harm you have perhaps done to others, are matters for confession.

Shopkeepers and tradesmen.

I have thought of all the sins I committed since my last confession, says the merchant and shop-keeper. Yes? And have you also examined how you have conducted your business? Are your weights and measures just? Have you sold old and damaged goods at a high price to the inexperienced, as if they were new and uninjured? Have you had recourse to lies and false oaths in order to sell your goods? All these things must be mentioned in confession, as well as the time and the number of times, how often and how long you have been practising them. I have thought of my sins, says a tradesman. Have you done honestly and properly the work entrusted to you? Have you asked for more material than was necessary to complete the work; or kept any considerable amount of what was over without the knowledge and consent of the owner? Have you bought from children or servants things that you might easily know were stolen. Have you allowed your workmen to work on Sundays and holydays, when there was no necessity? Have you thought of all this before confession?

Married people and heads of families.

Husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers of families, you have finished your examen of conscience, have you not? But I am afraid that many sins, which you should have thought of first of all, have escaped your memories. How have you observed the mutual obligations of your state, according to the exhortation of St. Paul? What care have you bestowed on the spiritual welfare of those subject to you? How have you looked after your children? Are you training them properly, and sending them to catechism and to sermons? Are you watchful over all their actions, so that you know where they go, whom they speak to, what company they keep, how they live, and whether they fear and love God? What example do you give them? What do they see in you and hear from you during the day? How do

you look after their temporal wants? Do you squander in drinking or gambling, in useless entertainments, or in dressing above your state, what you should spend on them? Do you keep them busy at some work befitting their state, or do you allow them to spend the day in idleness? Do you permit them to go to parties in which their precious souls can easily be exposed to danger? Do you give proper food and wages to your servants and laborers? All these things belong to the examen of conscience. But the obligations of particular states of life are seldom brought before the mirror; the sins committed against them are hidden in the depths of conscience; they are rarely made the subject of serious consideration, and therefore the accusation in confession is not complete.

Those who do not examine the sins they cause others to commit.

Further, people, generally speaking, examine the sins they have committed themselves. But wait a while, before you declare them in confession. What about the sins of others which you have occasioned or might have occasioned by impure conversation, by indecent signs and laughter, by immodesty in dress, by keeping improper pictures or statues in your houses or gardens, and thus running the risk of exciting impure desires and thoughts in the minds of those who see them; by selling, lending, or borrowing impure books and love-tales, that are liable to put bad thoughts into the minds of those who read them; and by any immodesty in dress, such as one has often to complain of being compelled to witness in the streets; nay, there are mothers who even suckle their children in public (what can the passers-by think of them?); by urging others to excessive drinking; by giving bad advice or encouraging others to sin; by doing a sinful act in presence of others; by cursing or swearing before children or servants and so teaching them that hellish language? These are the sins from which the Prophet David so often prayed to be delivered: "From those," the sins "of others spare Thy servant."[1] When the Germans in olden times had conquered the Hungarians, and were cutting down their enemies remorselessly, the trumpeters and drummers began to cry out, why do you kill us? we have done nothing to harm you; we have only blown our trumpets, or beaten our drums. Surely, our breath cannot have hurt you? We have not drawn the sword against any of you. No matter, was the answer of the victors; you deserve death more than any of the others, because your music encouraged them to fight, so that you have

[1] Ab alienis parce servo tuo.—Ps. xviii. 14.

sharpened their swords and spears against us. All who give scandal or occasion to sin are the drummers and trumpeters of hell; but how few there are who think of this when they are preparing for confession! I have done no harm, they say. Yes; you have done no harm to yourself, I grant; but how many sins have you not caused others to commit, and thus waged war against God by their means? All these are on your conscience, and you must confess them if you are in earnest about your conversion.

Those who pay no attention to sins of omission.

Finally, it is not enough to examine yourself on what you yourself have done to offend God, and on what you have caused others to do; you must not forget also to give an account of what you have left undone. For instance, you could and should have given your neighbor here and there a friendly warning, have kept him away from evil, urged him to good, or prevented him from doing or saying something sinful: but you have not done so. You had now and then an opportunity of saluting in a friendly manner or doing a service to a person who has injured you, but through hatred you did not avail yourself of it. You could have paid your debts at the proper time, or have given your laborers the wages due to them, or have made restitution of ill-gotten goods; but you did not do so. You might have given alms to the poor and needy according to your means, and have practised the works of Christian charity towards your neighbor; but you neglected doing so through avarice or sloth. These are the omissions that Jesus Christ will bring forward, on that last terrible day, against the wicked: "For I was hungry, and you gave Me not to eat."[1]

Hence, many make bad confessions, through culpable carelessness in the examen of conscience.

Ah, my dear brethren, what a fearful number of sins thus remains hidden in the conscience, because, through carelessness and culpable ignorance, people wish to know nothing about them! They look in the glass with but one eye. To many penitents one might say with truth what a doctor once said to a young man who showed him a small sore on his finger, and complained of the pain it caused him; ah, my friend, said the doctor, who knew by the color and the pulse of his patient that the latter was suffering from a dangerous illness, the evil is not in your finger alone; the chief cause of your suffering is hidden from you; your blood must be purified and your stomach put into order, or else we shall soon have to carry you to the grave. In the same way, there are many who come to the spiritual phy-

[1] Esurivi enim, et non dedistis mihi manducare.—Matt. xxv. 42.

sician and show him some trifling sores that trouble them; that is, they confess merely their daily faults. But if the priest could see into their consciences, might he not say to each of them, poor soul, your evil does not consist merely in what you have told me; what you have still kept back, and concealed from yourself, will be the cause of eternal death to you, unless you repent of and confess it. "Son of man," said the Lord to the Prophet Ezechiel, "dig in the wall."[1] "Go in and see the wicked abominations which they commit here."[2] My child, the priest might say, dig in the wall, examine the hidden recesses of your conscience, and there you will find a mass of abominations that you have not wished to see hitherto. You will see many sins of your own, which have been hitherto concealed from your eyes by an inordinate love of creatures, by your evil desires, and by all sorts of empty pretexts and excuses. You will see many sins of which you were the occasion to others by the scandal you gave them. You will see many omissions of the good that you were bound to do. Do you think, perhaps, that in the Day of Judgment you will be able to justify yourself from all these by saying, I have not known anything about those sins; I did not think that this or that was a grievous sin; I did not look on it as necessary to examine my conscience about those things? You did not wish to know, is the answer your Judge will give you; you did not wish to acknowledge your misdeeds; you have not examined your conscience with candor; your ignorance was wilful and culpable; true, your confessor, either because he knew nothing of your secret transgressions, or had not the courage to warn you about them, has often pronounced over you the words, "I absolve thee from thy sins;" but I, who know the secrets of the heart, and search the reins, I said at the time, "I condemn you on account of your sins."

Conclusion and resolution to examine our conscience with candor before confession.

But, my dear brethren, before it comes to that with us, let us make a better resolution; let us in future, whenever we go to confession, act with candor in the examen of conscience. What is the advantage of deceiving ourselves in a matter which so closely concerns our eternal salvation? What is the good of trying to make ourselves appear more innocent than we really are in the sight of God? Let each one, says St. Gregory, when he is examining his conscience, act as if he were making an inquiry against a stranger, nay, against his greatest enemy; so

[1] Fili hominis, fode parietem.—Ezech. viii. 8.
[2] Ingredere, et vide, abominationes pessimas, quas isti faciunt hic.—Ibid. 9.

that he may pass over nothing, and excuse nothing that he can with truth bring against himself. Ah, God of goodness and mercy, I say again, for my part, with Thy penitent servant David: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember."[1] "From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare thy servant."[2] Pardon the sins of which I have in any way been the occasion by scandal-giving. "Send forth Thy light and Thy truth;"[3] enlighten me with Thy light and in Thy truth, that I may know all the sins of my past life, repent of them with all my heart, confess them properly, do penance for them, avoid them in future, and love, praise, and serve Thee with all the greater fervor. Amen.

[1] Delicta juventutis meæ et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ps. xxiv. 7.
[2] Ab occultis meis munda me, et ab alienis parce servo tuo.—Ibid. xviii. 13, 14.
[3] Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam.—Ibid. xlii. 3.

ON SORROW FOR SIN.

TWENTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY AND NATURE OF SORROW FOR SIN.

Subject.

1. The most necessary part of the sacrament of penance is true sorrow for sin. 2. In what this sorrow consists.—*Preached on the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Ite, ostendite vos sacerdotibus.—Luke xvii. 14.
"Go, show yourselves to the priests."

Introduction.

Sinners, there is no other means for you to clean your souls, if they are affected with leprosy, that is, with the stain of mortal sin, and to receive forgiveness from the God whom you have offended, but to "show yourselves to the priests," to examine your consciences with candor, and to confess your sins fully. But wait a little; after all, the examen of conscience and the confession of one's sins are not enough; that which is chiefly required before confession is to have a true sorrow for sin, and it is that in which most people are wanting. This I shall now undertake to explain, and I say, without further preamble,

Plan of Discourse.

The most necessary part of the sacrament of penance is true sorrow for sin; this I shall show in the first and longer part. In what this sorrow consists, I shall explain in the second part.

O Mary, refuge of sinners, and you, holy guardian angels, you know that I and all your children cannot give you greater pleasure than when we repent of our sins, so that we may love

you with pure hearts; obtain for us, then, from God the grace to do that.

Sorrow for sin is a condition of forgiveness required by God.

There is no doubt that that means is the most necessary to a given end, which God requires to that end; which is alone capable of attaining that end; without which all other means are useless, and which cannot be replaced by any other means. Such, my dear brethren, is to him who has sinned grievously the necessity of true sorrow, in order that he may obtain forgiveness and save his soul. For, in the first place, even little children learning the catechism know that the chief part of the sacrament of penance is sorrow for sin. God is the Lord of all His graces, which He distributes as He pleases; now He has determined not to forgive any one his sins, under any circumstances, unless he is truly sorry for them. "This," says Tertullian, "is the price for which God is willing to give us pardon."[1] And that, too, with perfect justice; for, as theologians teach with St. Thomas, "mortal sin is a turning away from the Creator, and a turning towards creatures,"[2] by which, namely, man, of his own free will, abandons God, whose grace and friendship he despises, and, for the sake of some brutal lust, or temporal gain, or vain honor, attaches his heart to creatures. This is what the Lord complains of by the Prophet Jeremias: "Thus saith the Lord: What iniquity have your fathers found in Me, that they are gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity? . . . They have turned their back on Me and not their face."[3] Therefore, in order to be freed from sin and to recover the grace and friendship of God, the man who has been guilty of such wickedness and presumption must turn round the other way, that is, by another act of his free will, he must abandon creatures and turn towards his Creator; that is what he does when he is sorry for his sins.

And most justly, too.

And what less could God require as an atonement for the insult offered Him, than that he by whom He has been offended and abandoned should at least feel grieved and sorry for his crime? For not to repent of the insult offered would be in fact a fresh act of contempt towards the grace of God, and an evident sign that no value is attached to it, inasmuch as the loss of it does not even cause regret. It is acting towards God as if

[1] Hoc pretio nobis Deus veniam adjicere instituit.—Tertull. de pœni.

[2] Est aversio a Creatore, et conversio ad creaturam.

[3] Hæc dicit Dominus: quid invenerunt patres vestri in me iniquitatis, quia elongaverunt a me, et ambulaverunt post vanitatem? . . . verterunt ad me tergum, et non faciem.—Jerem. ii. 5, 27.

I were to say to a great lord whom I have offended, forgive me for what I have done; I am not sorry for it, nor do I make any promise that I will not do it again. In that way I should provoke the lord to be still more embittered against me, instead of receiving me again into his favor. When the emperor Hadrian heard that Tavianus, who had fallen into disgrace with him, was not disturbed thereat, and showed little regret for it, he caused him to be at once beheaded for despising the emperor's favor. It is, then, an undoubted fact that God will not pardon sin, either in or out of the sacrament of penance, unless the sinner is sorry for what he has done, and that it would not even be becoming His divine Majesty to do so.

Perfect sorrow reconciles the sinner with God, although all other means are wanting.

Secondly, sorrow for sin, when it arises from a perfect love of God, is such a powerful means of obtaining forgiveness that it at once justifies the sinner, even without any other means, and makes him a friend of God. In the Old Testament this perfect sorrow was the only means of obtaining pardon for one who had sinned mortally. In the New Law, if I have no opportunity of confession, either through want of a priest, or because I am in danger of death, if I make an act of perfect contrition, I am again a friend of God, even if I were the greatest sinner in the world, and the kingdom of heaven belongs to me as my lawful inheritance. Nor is any examen of conscience or of the number and nature of my sins required for this; it is enough if I am heartily sorry, from a motive of perfect charity, for having offended God. Even when I have an opportunity of confessing my sins, and intend availing myself of it, the moment I make this act of perfect sorrow, before I receive absolution, or tell my sins to the priest, or even examine my conscience, all my sins are at once forgiven, although the obligation of confessing those sins and receiving sacramental absolution for them still remains, because the law of God requires it. From this alone it is evident that it is the most necessary condition to ensure forgiveness; for, if all other means fail, it alone has the power of fully reconciling me to God.

Without sorrow, all other means together are useless.

Thirdly, the same necessity is still more evident from the fact that without this sorrow all other means are useless, as far as the obtaining pardon for sin is concerned. You may have spent a whole year in examining your conscience, and searching out its most hidden recesses, and writing out all your sins with their number, nature, and circumstances; you may have confessed all those sins with the greatest candor and humility, and with great

shame and mortification on your part, to a most learned, experienced, and pious priest; he may have given you sacramental absolution and all imaginable indulgences as well that it is in his power to give; you may have performed your penance, and done other voluntary penitential works besides; you may have, moreover, the earnest purpose of never again offending God by mortal sin during your whole life; but if true sorrow alone is wanting, or if the sorrow you have is not as it should be, then all your labor is in vain; not one of your sins is forgiven; you are not absolved from them; you are as you were before, a child of reprobation, an object of the divine malediction. Even the baptism of water, although it has the power of cleansing the soul from all stain of sin, and all punishment due to sin, so that, if one died immediately after having received it, he would go at once to heaven, even that cannot help an adult who has sinned grievously to obtain forgiveness, unless he first hates and detests his sins by an act of at least imperfect sorrow; such is the teaching of the Council of Trent. Therefore, my dear brethren, neither examen of conscience, nor confession, nor absolution, nor satisfaction, nor penance, nor holy baptism itself in the case of an adult, nor all the other means that God has appointed for the forgiveness of sin, are of the least use, if true sorrow for sin is wanting.

All the other parts of penance may be replaced by something else.

Finally, its indispensable necessity for the sinner is evident from the fact that there is nothing which can replace it or do its work. If, through inexperience, or inculpable ignorance, one has not properly examined his conscience, so that he has forgotten many grievous sins, provided he has otherwise done his best according to his ability, his sins will nevertheless be forgiven, for the goodness of God will take his inexperience and ignorance into consideration, and will make good his defects. Again, if through the same causes he has not confessed all his sins, without any fault on his part, provided he has otherwise done his best to prepare for confession, his sins will be forgiven him, the absolution he receives will be valid, for his ignorance excuses him, and he is bound to nothing further than to confess those sins the next time he goes to confession, if he remembers them. If he has not received absolution validly, either because the priest is not approved by ecclesiastical authority for hearing confessions, or because the priest, through wickedness, has not had the proper intention when giving absolution, nevertheless, if he has a perfect sorrow for his sins, God Himself will absolve

him; or else, if his sorrow is imperfect, he can be absolved by another priest, the next time he goes to confession. If he has forgotten his penance, or has not been able to perform it, he is no worse for that; the guilt of sin is taken away from his soul; for his incapacity excuses him. Nay, if through weakness or illness one cannot examine his conscience, nor declare his sins in confession, nor fulfil the penance enjoined him, provided he has the will to confess, even by signs, and has at the same time a true sorrow for sin, he can receive absolution, and his sins will be forgiven. Thus all these parts of the sacrament of penance may be supplied in some way or other, if in certain circumstances any of them is wanting.

But nothing can replace true sorrow, if it is wanting.

But with regard to sorrow for sin the matter is quite different. It is so absolutely necessary, that without it not a single sin will be forgiven. If one who has committed a mortal sin is so simple as to believe that it is enough for him to declare his sins in confession, even if he has never heard anything of sorrow for sin, and knows not how to excite it, his ignorance, although he cannot help it, does not excuse him; he is in the state of sin, and he remains in it. There is another who would willingly make an act of sorrow, but he cannot, on account of weakness and inability; his illness does not excuse him, and if he dies without that sorrow, although he may have received a thousand absolutions, he will be lost forever, and there is no help for him. If I have done my best to repent of my sins, and am of the opinion that I am really sorry for them (although, when a person does his best, the grace of true repentance will never be wanting to him), but if in reality I have not a true sorrow, my opinion will not save me; my sins will not be forgiven. If my confessor tries to encourage me by assuring me that I have a proper sorrow, and says that he will take my sins on himself if my sorrow is not a true one, the assurances of my confessor, even if he were the Pope himself, are of no use to me; I am still in the state of sin. Thus there is neither inexperience, nor ignorance, nor weakness, nor illness, nor indulgence, nor jubilee, nor priestly absolution, nor anything in the world that can dispense me from having true sorrow for my sins, or replace it, if it is wanting. If I have offended God by mortal sin, and die without truly repenting of it, whether wilfully, or through inculpable ignorance, or through some cause that I could not prevent, I am lost forever, not, indeed, on account of not having true sorrow for my sin, but on account of the sin I have committed

and have not annulled by true repentance (unless I make an act of perfect charity, for, as theologians teach, that includes a perfect sorrow for sin, and therefore is able to justify the sinner even outside the sacrament of penance). In the same way, a child who dies without being baptized before it comes to the use of reason cannot go to heaven, even if an attempt was made to administer baptism, but the person, without any fault of his, used white wine instead of water; that is a mistake that neither the child nor the person who wished to baptize it could help; and yet, as the necessary baptism is wanting, the child cannot have any share in the happiness of heaven.

Hence it is of the utmost importance. Shown by examples.

A certain cardinal was lying on his death-bed, and the Pope sent word to him that he would come and give him his apostolic benediction and a plenary indulgence in his last moments. "I am very grateful to your Holiness," answered the dying man, "for such an unmerited favor; but, alas, how much more pleasing and profitable it would be for me if you could also assure me that I have a true sorrow for my sins!" Truly, that was a sensible wish! If one could have given that sorrow to that unfortunate man who appeared after death to one of his former friends, he would have been able to give a better account of himself. His friend asked him how his soul fared in eternity. "Woe to me," was his answer, "I am in hell!" "But how can that be," asked the other, terror-striken; "you made a good confession before you died?" "Yes," was the answer, "that is true; I declared all my sins in confession." "And the priest gave you absolution?" "Yes, that is also true." "And you received holy Communion and extreme unction afterwards?" "Yes." "And then there were people there to pray with you continually, and to commend your soul into the hands of God on its departure out of this life?" "Yes." "And up to the very last moment almost you kissed the crucifix with the greatest devotion?" "Yes, all that was done." "And how, then, does it happen that you are in hell?" "Alas," cried out the unhappy soul, "the most necessary thing of all was wanting to me. I had not true sorrow for my sins, and without that all else that was done for me was of no avail; I am lost forever on account of the mortal sins I committed."

And should be made the object of our greatest

From this, my dear brethren, we can conclude that our greatest care and diligence, when going to confession, should be devoted to exciting in ourselves a true sorrow and repentance for sin, even when we have nothing but venial sins and daily shortcomings

to accuse ourselves of. If we have not a mortal sin on our conscience, it would be better for us to go to holy Communion without confession, than to confess without true sorrow. For, as I have often said already, I am never bound to confess venial sins; but if, nevertheless, I wish to confess them (and it is a good and useful thing to do) and have nothing else but venial sins, then I must necessarily make an act of true sorrow for all, or for one at least, otherwise I profane the holy sacrament, and the absolution I receive is invalid, on account of the want of one of the necessary parts of the sacrament. Hence it may be that of two persons who go to confession one may come out justified, although his conscience was burdened with a hundred mortal sins, because he has prepared properly for confession and has had a true sorrow for his sins, while the other, who was before pious and just, and had only venial sins to confess, comes out in the state of mortal sin, because he was wanting in true contrition; that is to say, if he is wanting in it through his own fault; for it is another thing if he believes in good faith that he has the necessary dispositions for the sacrament. Therefore I repeat the advice I have often given before, namely, that they who go frequently to confession and have nothing to accuse themselves of but venial sins and daily faults would do well to confess in general terms some sin of their past lives, for which they can easily make an act of contrition, so as not to expose the sacrament to the danger of being invalidly received.

care before confession.

But alas, that true sorrow and repentance for sin, which is most of all required in order to obtain forgiveness of sin, is also unfortunately that in which most penitents are wanting! Is not that the case, my dear brethren? How many are there not who imagine that, when they have examined their consciences accurately and declared all their sins in confession, they have done quite enough? They have not the least doubt that their confessions are good; but they hardly think of having the proper sorrow for sin, their only anxiety being not to leave out anything in confession. Again, you will find hundreds who are anxious and troubled after confession; and why? Ah, they think, have I left out anything? I wish I could be certain that I have told all my sins. But amongst the hundreds you will hardly find one who will be scrupulous as to whether he has had the proper sorrow for sin. It is a good thing to be careful in the examen of conscience, and one is bound to be so according to one's circumstances; it is also good and necessary to declare all one's grievous

But it is the last thing that many people think of.

sins, and not to conceal any of them wilfully; but that is not enough; the principal requisite for a good confession is to have true contrition for sin, and if this is wanting, the confession is worthless. There are others, again, who, when they have finished with the examen of conscience, and their turn has not yet come to enter the confessional, spend the time while they are waiting in saying the rosary, or in reading their prayer-books; these prayers are excellent in their way, but it is not the proper time for them when one should be trying to excite himself to sorrow for his sins.

Nay, many show by the way they live that they do not believe in the necessity of sorrow for sin in confession.

I will say nothing of those Christians whose mode of life sufficiently declares that they do not believe in the necessity of sorrow for sin, and who think that all they have to do is to tell their sins to the priest in order to be forgiven. For when they are assailed by temptation, and the opportunity is offered them, they fall into sin head foremost, without scruple or fear, and then say to others, or at least think to themselves, after all, what harm is there in what I have done? I can tell it in confession, and it will be all right. Yes, I readily believe that, if confession alone were required, one who has little fear of God might be more daring in offending Him; but confession is not enough; you must also detest your sins more than all other imaginable evils. Do you believe that? If you do, is it not a foolish thing for you to think or say, I will satisfy my passion now; I will say or do this sinful thing, and then I can confess it afterwards? That is just as senseless as if I were to say, there are many clever doctors in this town who can heal all kinds of wounds; I will therefore throw myself down from the top of a high wall, and break my limbs to pieces; I shall be sorry for having done so afterwards, but I can go to one of those doctors and he will cure me. The fact is, you do not believe in the necessity of true contrition for your sins, which you commit so freely; or else you do not understand what is meant by this contrition, so that, if you always confess in that way, you will never have a true sorrow and repentance. For my part, my dear brethren, out of a hundred bad confessions, I believe that ninety-nine are bad through want of true sorrow; for he who really repents of his sins will surely not be wanting in the other parts of the sacrament of penance. And this is almost the only thing that makes the duty of a confessor troublesome and difficult, namely, his anxiety that his penitent should show signs of adequate sorrow for his sins. If he can be, humanly speaking, certain

of this, he is not afraid of having to deal with any number of mortal sins, because his penitent has already the disposition that is most necessary in order to receive the sacrament worthily. But, some will think, if true sorrow is then so necessary, in what does it consist, so that we may be more careful regarding it in future? This question I shall briefly answer in the

Second Part.

To repent of a thing, and to be sorry for it, may be two quite different things. We are sorry when anything disagreeable happens to us, although we may not be to blame for it and could not have prevented it; for instance, through a decree of divine Providence, a mother loses by death her only beloved son. She cannot help the loss; she would willingly have kept her child alive if it were possible; it is the will and the decree of God, for her own and her child's greater good, that he should die; and yet she is sorry and feels such grief that her eyes are filled with tears, her heart with sighs, her mouth with complaints. A merchant has a large sum of money stolen from him by night, although he is very careful in looking after it; the loss cannot be attributed to any fault of his; yet he feels it very sorely, and is so sorry for it that he is almost driven to the verge of desperation. In both these cases there is sorrow, but in neither, repentance, because neither of these persons has done anything to repent of. On the other hand, if the mother, in a fit of passion, beats her child so severely, to make it stop crying, that it loses its breath and dies; or if the merchant does not go to the trouble of locking up his store at night, although he is well aware that there is danger of some one stealing his money, then, indeed, the mother and the merchant can have both sorrow and repentance. The one is sorry for the death of her child, the other, for the loss he has suffered, and both repent of their guilt; the mother repents of having beaten her child so severely, and the merchant repents of his carelessness in looking after his money; for both could have avoided, if they had wished, the misfortune that befell them. Ah, they say then, would that I had not done so! Would that I had not beaten my child so severely! Would that I had locked up my money more securely! I repent sincerely of what I have done!

To repent of a thing and to be sorry for it are different things.

What I have now said of natural sorrow and repentance is to be understood, due proportion being observed, of supernatural sorrow and repentance also. "Contrition," says the Council of

Supernatural sorrow for sin

does not consist in words or tears.

Trent, "is the sorrow of the mind which detests its sins and aspires to a better life."[1] Mark the words, "sorrow of the mind," or of the soul. Hence true contrition does not consist in the words that are spoken by the mouth, or read out of a prayer-book, no matter how earnest and expressive they are; nor does it consist in sighs or tears, nor in the sadness that is experienced in the sensitive part of the soul. These outward manifestations of grief are good and praiseworthy; they are sometimes the effect of a supernatural sorrow; but real contrition does not consist in them, nor are they always infallible signs of it; otherwise the wicked king Antiochus, the traitor Judas, and others like them, would have had true sorrow for their sins, for they wept on account of them; nor would the penitent David have had true sorrow when he said, "I have sinned against the Lord,"[2] in which passage we do not read of his having shed tears, and yet he was immediately assured, in the name of God, by the Prophet Nathan, that his sins were forgiven. Besides, if true contrition consisted in tears, women would have a great advantage over men, for they are of a more tender nature, and can be easily moved to tears, or, as people say, they can laugh and cry as they please. But it is not likely that the almighty God, who created both sexes for the same end, that is, for eternal happiness, has given to women an easier means of repentance, so that they can excite themselves to sorrow with less difficulty than men. That, I say, is not likely. Hence it may sometimes happen that a woman goes to confession weeping and moaning bitterly, while a man goes in as dry as a stick, without giving any outward signs of sorrow, yet the woman does not repent of her sins, while the man's repentance is true and sincere. Therefore those people act very wrongly who, in order, as they think, to awaken sorrow for their sins, make sensible efforts to force out tears and sighs, to the great detriment of their health; and if they succeed in doing so, they imagine they have true contrition. But they are greatly mistaken. Others think they have not true sorrow because they do not feel a palpitation of the heart, or some other sign of bodily excitement, or because they do not experience such a bitter sensible sorrow as they would feel at the death of their parents, children, or friends, since it is certain that the sorrow for sin must be greater than any sorrow caused by all the imaginable evils in the world. Ah, they think, that death, or

[1] Contritio est dolor animi, peccata sua detestantis, et ad vitam meliorem aspirantis.
[2] Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.

temporal misfortune, or trial causes me such grief that I cannot restrain my tears, while I am not able to shed one for having offended God by mortal sin; it can hardly be that I have a true sorrow for my sins.

It is a spiritual act of the understanding and the will.

What nonsense! Sorrow for sin is not a natural and sensible affection of the sensitive part of our nature, but a supernatural, spiritual affection of the reasoning soul, and it consists partly in a movement of sorrow in the understanding, and partly in an earnest retractation and condemnation in the will, just as we have seen already in the case of the mother who caused her child's death; the natural sorrow and repentance she experienced enabled her understanding to see that she had done wrong, and this knowledge induced her will to condemn her harsh treatment of the child, and to wish sincerely that she had not been guilty of it. So it is also with the soul of the penitent who has contrition for his sins. In the first place, when his conscience represents his sins to his memory, and he, enlightened by faith, has thought of what a great, almighty, all-seeing God, worthy of all love, he has despised, and of what a loving Father and sovereign Benefactor he has offended; of how he has inflicted eternal death on his own precious soul for the sake of some miserable, momentary pleasure, and sacrificed heaven and everything that is good, and exposed himself to the danger of being buried in hell forever, then his understanding is enabled to see, to his secret confusion, that he has indeed acted wrongly and foolishly. Am I not, he thinks to himself, foolish, presumptuous, ungrateful, and wicked, to have committed sin? This knowledge and sorrow on the part of the understanding are followed by a resolution and repentance on the part of the will, by which he hates, condemns, and, as it were, retracts the evil he knows he has done, and wishes heartily he had never done it. Ah, he says to himself in all sincerity, would that I had never done it! If it were to be done again, I would rather die a thousand times than be guilty of it! Now, if this sorrow of his arises from the fact that he is grieved at having offended and insulted God, whom he now loves above all things on account of His infinite perfections, then it is a perfect contrition, and can blot out sin even outside the sacrament of penance. But if it is caused by his grief at having offended God, who has been so good to him, or who can shut heaven against him, or condemn him to hell, then it is an imperfect contrition, which is sufficient to obtain forgiveness of sin in the sacrament of penance. You see now that all this is not necessarily an af-

fection of the senses or of the body, but that it resides in the mind and in the soul. No words are required for it, and the forms of acts of contrition that are found in prayer-books are placed there merely to help the understanding to see that it has done evil, and to impel the will to hate and detest the sin it has consented to. Nor does this contrition require a long time; if it is sincerely entertained in the heart even for a moment, that is long enough for it to obtain the forgiveness of sin.

And must be sincerely made.

I say that it must be sincerely entertained, so that, in virtue of my knowledge and detestation of sin, I am seriously resolved, if for instance I should fall into extreme poverty unless I commit a sin of injustice, rather to accept poverty than commit the sin; or, if I had to spend my life in the greatest suffering unless I consent to an impure desire, or speak unchastely, or otherwise indulge my passions, I am firmly resolved rather to choose the suffering than to consent to sin; and so also for all other sins. It is not, indeed, necessary for true contrition, nor is it always advisable, to imagine one's self in such circumstances; yet my sorrow for sin must be so sincere that I am disposed, if such circumstances arise, to prefer any evil rather than offend God by mortal sin.

Many have not that sincere sorrow.

Christians, have we always that earnest resolve when we are exciting ourselves to sorrow for sin before confession? Have you got it, who recite a whole catalogue of mortal sins in confession, and then repeat by heart the formula, "I am sorry for all these sins, because I have thereby offended God," while you hardly bestow a thought on the meaning of those words? The same I say to you who come to confession with a great number of mortal sins, and never show any signs of amendment from one confession to another. And to you also, who continue in the proximate occasion of sin, in impure intimacy, in hatred and enmity, in drunkenness, in the filthy habit of cursing and swearing, in following the unlawful customs of the world, and in the possession of ill-gotten goods. Are you all firmly resolved to detest your sins above every other evil? Do you seriously wish you had never committed them? But how is that possible? Your sorrow is only a lip-sorrow; it does not touch the heart, and therefore it is only an apparent, invalid, and sacrilegious sorrow, which adds to your sins instead of taking them away. I repeat what I have said already, out of a hundred bad confessions, ninety-nine, generally speaking, are invalid through a defect of true sorrow.

Almighty and most merciful God, do Thou with Thy penetrating voice suggest the conclusion to the hearts of all sinners, "Be converted to me with all your heart."[1] All that I require in order to forgive your sins is that you repent of and detest even for a moment your wickedness against Me; but that repentance must be sincere and earnest. If your hearts are so hard that they cannot be moved, come to Me, sigh and call out to Me for the grace of true repentance, and I will soften your hearts, so that you will find it easy to be sorry for your sins: "If he cry to Me, I will hear him, because I am compassionate;"[2] so have I said to all men long since. Do you then cry out to Me, and I will hear you, for I am merciful and do not desire the death of the sinner. And when you have finished your prayer, represent to yourselves by a lively faith Him whom you have offended, and how unjustly and ungratefully you have treated Him, what a great good you have lost by sin, what a terrible eternal evil you have thereby involved yourselves in. With the help of divine grace this consideration will move your soul heartily to detest sin, and it will compel Me to show you My mercy, and to receive you again into My friendship. Christians, follow the inspirations of the good God who is speaking to you! Amen.

We must pray fervently for the grace of true contrition.

TWENTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON THE PROPERTIES OF TRUE SORROW FOR SIN.

Subject.

1. True sorrow for sin must be extended to all the mortal sins that one has committed, without a single exception. 2. It must spring from a supernatural motive. Many faults are committed against both these properties of true sorrow.—*Preached on the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Nemo potest duobus dominis servire.—Matt. vi. 24.
"No man can serve two masters."

Introduction.

There are many so-called penitent Christians in the world nowadays who try to prove that they can do what Our Lord says

[1] Convertimini ad me in toto corde vestro.—Joel. ii. 12.
[2] Si clamaverit ad me, exaudiam eum, quia misericors sum.—Exod. xxii. 27.

cannot be done. They wish to serve the world and God at the same time; they wish to serve God, and also their rebellious flesh; they wish to give themselves partly to God, and partly to the devil. And this is principally the case with them when they are preparing for confession; for there are some sins they wish to banish out of their hearts, and others they remain attached to; or else, if they repent of all their sins, it is not from a supernatural motive. But they are attempting an impossibility; "No man can serve two masters." Last Sunday, my dear brethren, I showed the necessity of true contrition for him who has sinned grievously and wishes to go to confession, and that necessity is so absolute that under no circumstances can sins be forgiven without it. I have also explained in what this contrition consists, namely, in a penitent act of the understanding, by which I acknowledge that I have done evil, and in a penitent act of the will, by which I detest sin and sincerely wish I had never committed it. The further properties of contrition I shall now explain, against those who wish to serve two masters, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

True sorrow for sin must be extended to all the mortal sins that one has committed, without a single exception; that I shall explain in the first part. It must spring from God, that is, from a supernatural motive, as we shall see in the second part. Many faults are committed against both these properties of true contrition.

To avoid them in future, and to serve Thee with all our hearts, we humbly beg Thy help and grace, O God of goodness, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

He who fails to repent of one mortal sin that he has committed, does not repent of any.

He who wishes to be a true Catholic must believe all that the Catholic Church teaches. If he doubts of the truth of a single article of her teaching he is already a heretic and an apostate, if he obstinately perseveres in his doubt; nay, by the very fact of his doubting one article of faith, he refuses to believe in any. How is that? Because the motive that should impel him to believe in the one article holds good for all the others. For the same God, for instance, who has revealed that there are three divine Persons in one nature has also revealed that Jesus Christ is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, living God and Man, body and soul; and the word of God is as infallible in the latter article as it is in the former. Now, if I refuse to believe Him in one point, then I consider Him as guilty of deceit, and there-

fore I cannot believe anything He says. The same may be said of one who repents of his sins. If his sorrow does not extend to all the mortal sins he has committed, if there is but one of them that he does not detest with all his heart, then he is not a true penitent. Nay, he is not sorry for any of his sins, because the motive which should excite him to sorrow is opposed to one sin as well as to many. If I detest a mortal sin because it closes heaven against me and exposes me to the eternal flames of hell, provided my repentance is sincere, I must also detest every mortal sin, because they all entail the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. If I detest a mortal sin because I have thereby offended God, who is so good to me, I have the same reason for detesting all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I thereby have troubled Jesus Christ, my Saviour, who has loved me so much that He suffered death for me, I have the same cause to detest all mortal sins. If I detest a mortal sin because I have thereby despised God, who is worthy of all honor and love, the same motive should impel me to hate all sin, or else my repentance is not sincere.

One mortal sin is not forgiven without the others.

Even if I had some particular reason for detesting one certain mortal sin, on account of some special deformity which is not found in the other sins I have committed, and if, therefore, my sorrow does not extend to those latter, nevertheless God requires of me, if I wish to regain His grace and friendship and to receive the sacrament of penance validly, that I should hate and repent of all the mortal sins I have committed, and that, too, with my whole heart. For according to the present arrangements of divine Providence one mortal sin cannot be remitted without the others, and none without true sorrow; all must be forgiven together, or else none at all. God will not make friendship with the sinner until the latter has subscribed to all the required conditions; all that He hates must be given up and destroyed. "Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities," He says to sinners by His Prophet Ezechiel, for all without exception, "and iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed,"[1] all without exception; for, if you allow a single one of them to remain on your conscience, you will assuredly die the death of the sinner.

[1] Convertimini, et agite pœnitentiam ab omnibus iniquitatibus vestris; et non erit vobis in ruinam iniquitas. Projicite a vobis omnes prævaricationes vestras, in quibus prævaricati estis.—Ezech. xviii. 30, 31.

Therefore my repentance is not good, unless I am sorry for all my sins.

And what good would it do me to shed bitter tears for a hundred grievous sins, if my heart and will still remained attached to but a single one? All my tears and repentance would be utterly useless. For if every mortal sin can be compared to a thunder-cloud, according to the words of the Prophet Isaias, "I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist," [1] what better am I for having gone through a hundred storms without injury, if in one of them a thunder-bolt strikes me to the ground? If every sin is a strong cord, as the penitent David says, "The cords of the wicked have encompassed me," [2] does it help me to my freedom to have burst a hundred cords, if I am still bound fast with one in the cruel slavery of the devil? If every mortal sin is a heavy burden, according to the bitter complaint of the same David, "My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me," [3] what lighter will I be for having thrown a hundred of them off my conscience, if there still remains a heavy mill-stone whose weight is enough to drag me down into the abyss of hell? If every mortal sin brings eternal death, "The soul that sinneth, the same shall die," [4] is my life any safer because I am pierced through the heart with one instead of a hundred bullets, or with one instead of a hundred swords? In a word, what good is it to repent of a hundred sins, if I am to be damned on account of one? Hell is full of unfortunate sinners who are lost through a single bad habit, a single vice to which they were addicted during their lives. How, then, can I expect to obtain pardon, if I repent of one sin and not of all, since God will not forgive one without the other? Therefore true sorrow must be extended to all mortal sins that one has committed: "Do penance for all your iniquities."

Many penitents act wrongly in this respect, as Saul did with the Amalekites.

O contrition of many Christians who go to confession, of what kind art thou, I ask again? Art thou always able to loosen every chain, to destroy everything that is hateful to the offended Majesty of God? Does it not sometimes happen that one or another sin is kept in the heart, made the object of a special attachment, and is neither detested nor renounced? Ah, I fear there are many sins that remain still unrepented of! They are the Amalekites rejected by God, who still live in our

[1] Delevi ut nubem iniquitates tuas, et quasi nebulam peccata tua.—Isa. xliv. 22.

[2] Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.—Ps. cxviii. 61.

[3] Iniquitates meæ supergressæ sunt caput meum, et sicut onus grave gravatæ sunt super me.—Ibid. xxxvii. 5.

[4] Anima quæ peccaverit, ipsa morietur.—Ezech. xviii. 20.

midst, and whom the Lord has commanded us, as he formerly did king Saul, to destroy, and to immolate as a sacrifice to His avenging justice. God commanded the Prophet Samuel to say to Saul, "Go and smite Amalec, and utterly destroy all that he hath; spare him not, nor covet anything that is his; but slay both man and woman, child and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." [1] Saul obeyed, but not fully, as God had commanded him; he cut and burnt, and hacked and slew; but whom and what? "All the common people," says the Holy Scripture, "he slew with the edge of the sword. And Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the flocks of sheep and of the herds, and the garments and the rams, and all that was beautiful, and would not destroy them." [2] He kept for himself what was of any use to him, "but everything that was vile and good for nothing, that they destroyed." [3] And therefore he received from Samuel the sad news that God had deposed him from his throne, and rejected him, because he did not destroy everything according to the command of the Lord. "For as much, therefore, as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king." [4]

For they repent of some sins, but not of habitual ones.

There we have a striking picture of the conduct of many Christians when they are preparing for confession. As we have seen already, God has commanded them by the Prophet Ezechiel to put off all sin: "Cast away from you all your transgressions, by which you have transgressed, and make to yourselves a new heart and a new spirit." [5] If you wish to do penance, you must slay with the sword all the sins you have committed, that is, you must destroy them by true contrition. But how do they act? Many of them are obedient to the divine command, but after the fashion of Saul; they act towards their vices as he did towards the Amalekites: "All the common people he slew with the edge of the sword." They repent of and detest the sins that do not excite strong desires in them, from which they hope for no special profit or pleasure, and which they have not much difficulty in avoiding; these they sacrifice to the divine justice.

[1] Vade, et percute Amalec, et demolire universa ejus; non parcas ei, et non concupiscas ex rebus ipsius aliquid; sed interfice a viro usque ad mulierem, et parvulum atque lactentem, bovem et ovem, camelum et asinum.—I. Kings. xv. 3.

[2] Omne autem vulgus interfecit in ore gladii. Et pepercit Saul et populus Agag, et optimis gregibus ovium et armentorum, et vestibus et arietibus, et universis quae pulchra erant, nec voluerunt disperdere ea.—Ibid. 8, 9.

[3] Quidquid vero vile fuit et reprobum, hoc demoliti sunt.—Ibid. 9.

[4] Pro eo ergo, quod abjecisti sermonem Domini, abjecit te Dominus, ne sis rex.—Ibid. 23.

[5] Projicite a vobis omnes prævaricationes vestras, in quibus prævaricati estis, et facite vobis cor novum et spiritum novum.—Ezech. xviii. 31.

For instance, one has omitted, through culpable neglect, to hear Mass on a Sunday or holy-day; another, in a fit of anger, has cursed from his heart his parents, his wife, or his children, and he was afterwards frightened at what he said; another has eaten meat on a fast day, or has taken a false oath, or has done something to injure one who was formerly his friend, and so on. These are, so to speak, the common herd of sins, from which no particular profit or pleasure is to be expected; these must be declared in confession, and be heartily repented of: "All the common people he slew with the edge of the sword;" but what becomes of the king? what of the more important and attractive transgressions? "Saul spared Agag . . . and all that was beautiful." That is what they do. Whatever is pleasing to the senses, and has captivated their hearts for a long time, is spared. That unlawful, scandalous intercourse with that person, which there is no intention of abandoning; the proximate occasion of sin, which one does not wish to leave; the inveterate habit of sensual indulgence; that long-standing hatred and enmity; those ill-gotten possessions, that have been kept so long without any restitution being made; the habit of drunkenness and intemperance, which is the occasion of many sins; those scandalous abuses, which are such an occasion of sin to others, etc., these are the king Agag whose life is saved; these are kept uninjured in the heart, in the inclination, and in the desires; these sins are not repented of, because there is no serious intention of avoiding them.

Because they fear the difficulty of amending them.

Hear, O sinner, if you wish to be truly converted to God and to receive pardon of your sins; you must, as soon as ever you can, restore your ill-gotten goods to their lawful owner. Alas! you say, I am sorry for my sins; is not that enough, without giving back those things? It is too difficult for me to do it now; some other time, when I am richer. You see how it is? The king's life must be spared. If you wish to do penance, you must forgive your enemy from your heart, and, if necessary, beg his pardon, and be fully reconciled to him. What? Be reconciled to that man? Never; the thing is impossible; he has insulted me too grossly, and I cannot bear the sight of him; I forgive him in my heart, but I cannot help rejoicing if some misfortune happens to him. There is another king whose life has to be spared. If you wish to do penance and to be readmitted to the friendship of God, you must leave the proximate occasion of sin, and give up your bad habits, live more soberly,

avoid cursing and swearing, dissensions and scandal-giving, and whatever is an occasion of sin to you must be got rid of at once. That improper intimacy has to be broken off, and the proximate occasion of sin to be shunned; you must nevermore enter that house, or go into that company; if the person with whom you have hitherto been in the habit of sinning is dearer to you than the apple of your eye, or more useful to you than your hand or foot, yet you must give up that person once for all, according to the command of Our Lord, "If thy eye scandalize thee pluck it out and cast it from thee; it is better for thee, having one eye, to enter into life, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."[1] Have you thought of this seriously? Do you repent of and detest with your whole heart your attachment to these evil habits, occasions, and company, and hate it above every imaginable evil? Do you really prefer to die rather than go back to your evil ways? Alas, cries out your conscience, how can I abandon this or that habit? What will people say? How can I leave that person, break off that intimacy, or go away before the time I engaged for has expired? I dare not do it. The only pleasure or comfort I have is in the society of that person; how can I venture now to cause him or her such trouble? It is impossible; I cannot do it; God will not look at it as a grievous sin on my part. A fine repentance that! The king's life must again be spared.

He who wishes to be truly converted must repent of all his sins.

In that way we do penance in appearance, but not in reality; and we are worse when we come out of the confessional, than when we went in. For repentance does not in that case extend to every mortal sin, and therefore you who act thus are in a miserable and damnable state; not one of your sins is forgiven; the Lord God has rejected you. It is true, He has promised you His grace and friendship, and is ready to give them to you at any moment; but on condition that you repent of all your sins without exception. Hear what He says by the Prophet Ezechiel: "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins, which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments . . . living he shall live, and shall not die; I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done."[2] "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord,"[3] says the Prophet Jeremias. And why

[1] Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te; bonum tibi est cum uno oculo in vitam intrare, quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis.—Matt. xviii. 9.

[2] Si autem impius egerit pœnitentiam ab omnibus peccatis suis, quæ operatus est et custodierit omnia præcepta mea . . . vita vivet, et non morietur; omnium iniquitatum ejus, quas operatus est, non recordabor.—Ezech. xviii. 21, 22.

[3] Effunde sicut aquam cor tuum ante conspectum Domini.—Lament. ii. 19.

not like oil or balsam? No; for oil or balsam cannot be poured out of a glass so that none of it remains sticking to the sides of the vessel, while water, on the contrary, may be poured out at once almost to the last drop. Sinner, when you go to confession, "Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord," so that not one of your sins remains unrepented of. Therefore contrition must be extended to every mortal sin. But it must also proceed from a supernatural motive, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

Many examples of penitents in Holy Scripture whose repentance was worth nothing.

By the motive I mean that which impels us to sorrow and repentance; and it must be supernatural; that is to say, that which moves me to be sorry for my sins must come from faith. A few examples will serve to make this clear. We find in the Holy Scriptures instances of sinners who were addicted to almost the same vices, and were guilty of almost the same sins, and, apparently at least, did penance in the same way: who would not say that they all received pardon and grace from the God of infinite justice and mercy? Yet such is not the case. King Pharao sinned by rebelling against the divine command, and he repented of his disobedience, not once, but several times; for he sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them with a sorrowful heart: "I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you;"[1] I have done evil in not allowing your people to go out of my country, as the Lord commanded them. I have sinned; "But now forgive me my sin this time also;" I will not be guilty of it again; "and pray to the Lord your God, that He take away from me this death;"[2] go at once and offer sacrifice to the Lord. King Saul, as we have seen already, sinned by disobedience to the command of God, and he, too, repented. "I have sinned," he said to Samuel, "because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord. . . But now bear, I beseech thee, my sin, and return with me, that I may adore the Lord."[3] King Antiochus sinned by pride, but he repented of his sin and wept bitter tears on account of it. "And by this means," says the Holy Scripture, "being brought from his great pride, he began to come to the knowledge of himself;"[4] and he acknowledged

[1] Peccavi in Dominum Deum vestrum, et in vos.—Exod. x. 16.

[2] Sed nunc dimitte peccatum mihi etiam hac vice, et rogate Dominum Deum vestrum, ut auferat a me mortem istam.—Ibid. 17.

[3] Peccavi quia prævaricatus sum sermonem Domini. Sed nunc porta, quæso, peccatum meum, et revertere mecum, ut adorem Dominum.—I. Kings xv. 24, 25.

[4] Hinc igitur cœpit ex gravi superbia deductus ad agnitionem sui venire.—II. Machab. ix. 11.

openly before his whole court what he had done, in order to atone for the scandal he had given by his pride. "It is just to be subject to God, and that a mortal man should not equal himself to God."[1] Judas sinned when he betrayed his Master for money, but he repented. "I have sinned," he said to the high-priests, "in betraying innocent blood;"[2] and in order to prove the sincerity of his repentance, he brought back the thirty pieces of silver and threw them down in the temple.[3] But what good did their repentance do those people? None at all; in spite of it, they were lost forever.

While others, whose repentance was apparently the same, were forgiven.

On the other hand, King David sinned, and that, too, in consequence of the greater lights he enjoyed, more grievously than those others, when he committed the crimes of adultery and murder. "I have sinned against the Lord,"[4] said he to the Prophet Nathan; that was all the proof he then gave of his repentance, and yet the Prophet said to him at once: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."[5] The notorious sinner Magdalene loved Our Lord with all her heart, and cast herself down at His feet; whereupon she had the happiness of hearing from His own divine lips the words, "Many sins are forgiven her."[6] Peter denied his Master most shamefully three times; but he began to weep immediately after, and not another word was said of his sin. The thief on the cross, who probably had not done a good act during his whole life, only said to Christ the words, "Lord remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom,"[7] and at once the eternal kingdom was promised him; "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise."[8]

Because the former had not supernatural sorrow.

How is it, my dear brethren, that there is such a difference between the effects of a repentance that seems in every case the same? Has God, perhaps, more respect for one than for another? But that cannot be, for otherwise the Apostle would not have spoken the truth when he wrote to the Ephesians, "The Lord of you is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with Him."[9] It makes no difference to Him who does penance; if

[1] Justum est subditum esse Deo, et mortalem non paria Deo sentire.—II. Machab. ix. 12.
[2] Peccavi, tradens sanguinem justum.—Matt. xxvii. 4.
[3] Pœnitentia ductus retulit triginta argenteos.—Ibid. 3.
[4] Peccavi Domino.—II. Kings xii. 13.
[5] Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum; non morieris.—Ibid.
[6] Remittuntur ei peccata multa.—Luke vii. 47.
[7] Domine, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum.—Ibid. xxiii. 42.
[8] Amen, dico tibi, hodie mecum eris in paradiso.—Ibid. 43.
[9] Vester Dominus est in cœlis, et personarum acceptio non est apud eum.—Ephes. vi. 9.

the poor beggar is really sorrow for his sins, there is pardon and grace for him, as well as for the penitent king or prince. What, then, is the reason of the difference? In the eyes of men, says St. Augustine, there was no difference between the repentance of the former and that of the latter; but the divine Judge, who sees the secrets of the heart, did not look at the matter as we do. For in the case of the former it was some mere natural motive that moved them to sorrow; the sighs were pressed from their hearts, and the apparently penitent tears from their eyes, not by the thought that they had offended the great God, but by a desire of their own temporal advantage, or by the fear of some temporal calamity. Pharao was afraid that still greater plagues would fall upon him, as Moses had threatened in the name of God; and therefore he repented of his disobedience. Saul was anxious to retain the crown, and when Samuel told him that he would lose it for his sin, he repented at once. Antiochus was afraid of death, and hoped to be freed from the intolerable stench of his illness, for he was being eaten alive by worms; and therefore he wept and acknowledged God as his supreme Lord. Judas could not bear the tortures of a bad conscience, which brought him, not to a true supernatural contrition, but to the extremity of despair. Therefore none of those sinners found grace and mercy from God.

The same defect is found in many who repent because their sins cause them temporal loss or shame.

O Christians, what sort of confessions do you make? Of what kind is your sorrow for sin? I have sinned; I repent of my sins, and am sorry for them, etc. That is what they all say; and many of them are indeed sorry that they have sinned, and would wish never to have committed a sin; but what is the motive of their sorrow? What makes them shed tears of repentance? Is it because they have offended the almighty God, who is infinitely good and worthy of all love? Ah, I am afraid that is what most of them think the least of! Some temporal object, or natural fear and anxiety, or misfortune, or the dread of disgrace before the world; such are the motives that induce them to detest what they have done against the law of God. For instance, a person comes to confession (I know of no such person, my dear brethren, I am speaking only of what may occur), who has been guilty of the sin of impurity, and is so full of sighs and tears that one might imagine that it was a penitent Magdalene who was there; but in the sight of God, who cannot be deceived, those sighs and tears are of no value. Why? Why does he not notice such vehement sorrow? Because that

person's tears and grief arise from the dread of shame and disgrace before the world; that is the only motive from which they spring. A servant comes to confession to accuse himself with many tears of a theft he has committed. Alas, he says, I have sinned! And why is he so afflicted? Is it because he has offended the good God? Not at all. He has been caught in the act by his master, turned out of the house, and has consequently lost his good name, so that he cannot find another place; that is what fills his eyes with tears. Another accuses himself of gluttony and drunkenness, of quarrelling and contention, of cursing and swearing and gambling; and he is sorry for those sins; but why? Because he has lost the inestimable treasures of divine grace? Not by any means. By drinking and gambling he has reduced himself and his children to poverty; he has spent his week's wages; or he has lost a law-suit that he had unjustly commenced; there you have the only motive of his sorrow. All these people may have committed other sins as well; they may have grievously injured their neighbor's good name, or committed some other sin against charity; they may have sought to be revenged on their enemies, have indulged in immodest conversation, have taken deliberate pleasure in impure thoughts, have given scandal to others by word or deed, etc.; but when they come to speak of those sins, there is an end of their tears and sighs, because they have suffered no temporal loss by them, and are not put to shame before the world; and yet the great God is offended by the latter sins as well as by the former. That is an evident proof that their sorrow and repentance come only from some natural motive and are worth nothing as far as the forgiveness of sin is concerned.

Others bewail their trials and crosses.

Another person comes and accuses himself of continual impatience, saying that he has often murmured against God, and given way to despair, and wished death to himself and to his family. If he is asked why, there is no end to his tears and lamentations. Oh, what a heavy cross I have to bear! I cannot stand it any longer! I must put an end to myself! And then he begins to relate the whole history of his misfortunes, until the confessor, with great difficulty, succeeds in quieting him down somewhat. Now, of what use are those sighs and tears to repentance? Not the least. For it is not the offence offered to God, but their own misery and trials that they deplore; their sorrow is not supernatural, and, in fact, such people are the least capable of being moved to true contrition for their sins,

because their hearts are fully occupied with their natural grief, and their minds are too disturbed to admit of good thoughts. A woman has been for a long time in the habit of cursing her husband and her children; she has caused her parents great sorrow, and has treated them very harshly, and she confesses those sins constantly, without any serious effort to amend them. At last her husband, or her father, or her child dies; and then her heart is softened; then she runs to confession, bathed in tears. Unhappy wretch that I am, she exclaims, what have I done? How cruelly I have acted towards my dear husband or child, to my father, who was always so good to me, to my mother, who took such care of me! I am so sorry for it now! Would that I never had been guilty of such harshness towards them! But why do you make such a lamentation about it now? When your husband, or parents, or child were alive, did not your conduct provoke the wrath of God just as much as it does now? But you were not sorry for cursing and swearing at them then; you shed not a single tear of repentance; and even now you continue the same harsh treatment towards your other children, who are still alive; you still trouble your mother by your disobedience. Thus it is evidently a mere natural feeling of compassion for your deceased relatives that causes your sorrow, and not the fact of your having offended God. But what is the good of such a repentance as that? The tears you shed are like the sap that drops from a tree, when a branch is cut off it in spring-time, and which simply wets the outer bark, without contributing anything to the fruitfulness of the tree.

How Nathan moved David to supernatural sorrow.

Your motive for repenting of and detesting your sins must be far different, if you wish to regain the grace and friendship of God in the sacrament of penance. Represent to yourself by faith what a great, mighty, powerful, omnipresent, good, merciful, and just God you have despised by your sins; the immense loss you have caused your soul to suffer; the punishment, the eternal flames of hell, that you have merited in the next life, and then you will have reason enough to deplore your sins with true interior sorrow. When you are going to confession, let faith speak to your heart in silent meditation, as the Prophet Nathan spoke to king David, when the latter was still in the state of sin and had forgotten God, in order to move him to repentance. Mark the tone in which the Prophet addresses him: "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I anointed thee king

over Israel;"[1] (pay attention, David, for it is the Lord who is speaking to you!) think of what you were a few years ago; you were a poor little boy, running about barefooted, the least amongst your brethren, who had nothing to hope for but what you could earn by the sweat of your brow; a poor shepherd boy, ill clad, you were glad when you had bread enough to eat. And I have given strength to your arms, that you might slay the fierce lion; I enabled you to overthrow the mighty giant, and to put his army to flight; and finally, out of sheer mercy and good-will to you, I have raised you to the throne; "I anointed thee king over Israel." Is not that so? Yes, David was obliged to confess, it is quite true. "I delivered thee from the hand of Saul."[2] Do you remember how you fared at the court of that king? How he often tried in his madness to pierce you with his spear, and how he pursued you everywhere with his army, seeking to kill you? Who helped you in those difficulties? Who protected you and saved you from the hands of your enemy? It was I, as you know very well. "And I gave thee thy master's house."[3] The splendid palace in which you now live, the gardens that surround it, the treasures which you possess in such abundance, whom did all those things belong to a few years ago? To Saul, your master.

And I have taken them from him, in order to bestow them on you, who never expected to be raised to such dignity and wealth. Is not that the case? "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in My sight? Thou hast killed Urias the Hethite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife."[4] Have I deserved that from you? When I placed the crown on your head, was that the time for you to trample My commandments under foot? When I raised you from out of obscurity, was it right of you to make Me your foot-stool? Ungrateful mortal, how have you dared to treat Me thus? But cease, O Lord, I pray Thee; Thy servant is at hand to secure pardon for the poor king, who is ready to die of shame and sorrow! "I have sinned against the Lord,"[5] said David, and his deep contrition prevented him from saying any more.

So, also, must the sinner pre-

Sinner, when you are preparing for confession, you should imagine that God is speaking to you in the same manner; that

[1] Hæc dicit Dominus Deus Israel: Ego unxi te in regem super Israel.—II. Kings xii. 7.

[2] Ego erui te de manu Saul.—Ibid. [3] Et dedi tibi domum domini tui.—Ibid. 8.

[4] Quare ergo contempsisti verbum Domini, ut faceres malum in conspectu meo? Uriam Hethæum percussisti gladio, et uxorem illius accepisti in uxorem tibi.—Ibid. 9.

[5] Peccavi Domino.—Ibid. 13.

pare himself for repentance.

He says to you, I have created you; a few years ago you were nothing; I could have left you in the abyss of your nothingness; I have chosen you in preference to countless others, whom I might have created, and have drawn you forth from that abyss, and made you to My image and likeness; your soul and body, your understanding, memory, health, skill, good name, and temporal support, all that you have and are, are benefits that you have received from Me; and I have given them to you without any merits on your part. The sun and moon, the stars in the heavens, the air, water, fire, the earth, and all that it produces, I have created for your service, comfort, support, and enjoyment. Is not that the case? I have redeemed you from eternal death. When David sinned, I had not yet become man, nor died on the cross, nor given Myself as the food of men's souls in the Blessed Sacrament; but since then I have come down from My throne of glory in heaven, taken on Myself the semblance of a poor servant, lived a life of toilsome poverty, and shed even the last drop of My blood, and all that for your sake, in order to save you from hell. In preference to many thousand others, I have called you to the true faith, given you My Flesh and Blood as the food of your soul, and preserved you from many dangers of soul and body. Often, when you had sinned mortally, I could have hurled you into hell, where many are burning now who have committed less sin than you; and while you were actually in the state of sin, I have had the greatest patience with you, although I could have inflicted eternal punishment on you at any moment. Look where you will, and everything you see, everything you have or know, or can do, is it not all from My goodness that you have it? Can you deny that? "Why, therefore, hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do evil in My sight?" If I had injured instead of benefiting you, could you have treated Me worse? And yet, in any case, I should be your supreme, almighty God, deserving of all your love, reverence, and obedience. See how ungrateful you have been to your sovereign Benefactor!

Conclusion and repentance for past sin.

Ah, Christian soul, is it possible that those thoughts do not cause your heart to melt with sorrow and contrition? Say therefore, with the penitent David, "I have sinned against the Lord," ungrateful wretch that I am; I have offended Him, who has never done me the least injury! Shameless mortal that I am, I have rejected Him, who has done me good every moment of my life. How rashly I have acted in sacrificing His grace and

friendship for some miserable thing, some wretched gain, some vain honor, or brutish pleasure, and in bartering the joys of heaven for the eternal flames of hell! Foolish mortal that I am! Even if I did not suffer such a loss, I have been guilty of despising and insulting the great God to His very face! Presumptuous wretch that I am, what have I done? What could I have been thinking of, when I dared to act thus towards my God? Alas, I have sinned against the Lord; I acknowledge it now with shame; I have sinned often and grievously, O Lord, in Thy sight; and now all I can think and say is, I am sorry for it! Would that I had never offended Thee! Pardon me this once, O God of mercy, and I will never offend Thee again. Such is the way, my dear brethren, in which you must prepare yourselves to have a supernatural sorrow. Do Thou, O God of goodness, move my heart and the hearts of us all to this sorrow for our sins, by Thy powerful grace! And then let us all experience the realization of that assurance that Thy Prophet gave Thy penitent servant David: "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin; thou shalt not die."[1] Such will be the case with you, O sinners, if you repent sincerely of your sins, in the way I have now explained to you! May God grant it! Amen.

[1] Dominus quoque transtulit peccatum tuum: non morieris.—II. Kings xii. 13.

MOTIVES OF TRUE REPENTANCE.

TWENTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON REPENTANCE FOR SIN ON ACCOUNT OF THE STRICT JUSTICE OF GOD.

Subject.

The strict justice of God in punishing sinners is especially evident in the punishment of the angels; and therefore we should be truly sorry for our sins and dread offending a God who chastises so severely.—*Preached on the feast of St. Michael the Archangel.*

Text.

Michael et angeli ejus prœliabantur cum dracone.—Apoc. xii. 7.
"Michael and his angels fought with the dragon."

Introduction.

Who could ever have imagined, unless the infallible Spirit of God Himself had revealed it, that there was war in heaven, tumult among the stars, rebellion amongst the angels? Yet such was the case. "There was a great battle in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels."[1] But the strife did not last long; Michael and his followers soon gained the victory: "And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent who is called the devil. . . and he was cast down unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."[2] This is a wonderful occurrence, my dear brethren, and it gives rise to many serious considerations. Is it, then, possible for the heavenly spirits to sin, and that in heaven, too; to fall and to be cast into hell? Alas, who then can be

[1] Et factum est prœlium magnum in cœlo: Michael et angeli ejus prœliabantur cum dracone, et draco pugnabat, et angeli ejus.—Apoc. xii. 7.

[2] Et projectus est draco ille magnus, serpens antiquus, qui vocatur diabolus. . . et projectus est in terram, .et angeli ejus cum illo missi sunt.—Ibid. 9.

free from sin on earth? "Michael and his angels fought with the dragon;" in order to avenge the injured honor of God, they boldly took up arms, and cast the rebels out of heaven. Therefore, in all temptations and dangers that threaten our souls, we should call upon St. Michael and our holy guardian angels with child-like confidence for help, that they may continue, as they have hitherto done, to drive away from us the demons who assail us. "And that great serpent was cast out, and his angels were thrown down with him." I shudder when I think of that! The angels were thrown down from heaven into the abyss of hell! Oh, what a just God we have, and how severe He is in His punishments! Who should not dread offending Him in the least? Who should not tremble at the thought of having ever offended Him by mortal sin! This is the thought that I shall develop to-day, by way of salutary warning.

Plan of Discourse.

The strict justice of God in punishing sinners is especially evident in the reprobation of the angels. Such is the whole subject of this meditation. To know the wickedness of sin, to repent of the sins we have committed, to be careful in avoiding sin in future, and to love and fear God always, such shall be the conclusion.

To which mayest Thou, O Almighty God, help us by Thy powerful grace, through the meditation of Thy strict justice. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, St. Michael, the Archangel, and our holy guardian angels.

The strict justice of God in the reprobation of the angels shown by a simile.

In order to realize the strict justice with which the Lord Our God acted towards the rebel angels, imagine, my dear brethren, that you see a criminal being dragged out of his prison, placed on a hurdle, and brought through the public streets to the place of execution, where he is first to be broken on the wheel and then burnt to ashes. All are stricken with astonishment at hearing of such an extraordinary and unusually severe punishment. Who is the poor man? they ask; where does he come from? what has he done? And they are told that he is one of the highest of the nobility, a minister and courtier, who, on account of his knowledge, prudence, and skill, was hitherto held in the greatest esteem by his sovereign; who had the arrangement of nearly everything in the whole kingdom, and who would still do much for the welfare of his country and the honor of his

sovereign, if his life were spared. Oh! each one would cry out, horror stricken at this answer, I thought he must have been one of the vilest of the common people, a notorious robber or murderer. But no, is the reply; he is, as I have said, one of the noblest in the land. And who has passed such a severe sentence on him? Our sovereign himself. What? Our sovereign? He who is known everywhere to be a most gentle, mild, good and merciful ruler, who can hardly bear to inflict a trifling fine on a lowly peasant, so filled is he with pity and compassion? Is it he who has condemned to the wheel and the stake one whom he formerly held in such high esteem? Yes, it is he. But it is impossible that such a sentence could be really carried into execution; it is published, doubtless, in order to strike terror into other malefactors; but when he arrives at the place of execution his life will certainly be spared? Not the least chance of it: if you go there yourself, you will see what will be done to him, and how his clothes will be pulled off, his limbs broken to pieces one after another on the wheel, and how he will then be thrown, still living, into the flames, where he will be burnt to ashes. What do you think of it now? Well, if that is the case, he must have committed some enormous crime, or he would not have provoked such a mild and merciful sovereign to inflict such a dreadful punishment on him. Such is the conclusion that every thinking man must come to, under the circumstances.

The angels were mighty princes of heaven.

Now, my dear brethren, to drop metaphors, and speak of the matter as it really is, ascend with me in thought into the courts of heaven; imagine that you see there countless numbers of angels, who have still to merit their eternal happiness. The very name of angel suggests a nature that is noblest, mightiest, and most beautiful amongst all mere creatures, the most excellent master-pieces of the Almighty's power; full of knowledge and wisdom, as far as the understanding is concerned; endowed with the most complete freedom of the will; adorned with all kinds of natural and supernatural gifts, and created to the end that they might be courtiers and princes of heaven in the palace of the Most High, whose duty should be to stand round His throne and further His exterior honor and glory forever; and, besides, they were chosen by God as His ministers to carry out His commands on earth. Amongst these princes of heaven one of the noblest, if not the noblest, was Lucifer. "Thou wast the seal of resemblance," such are the terms in which God addresses him by the Prophet Ezechiel, "full of wisdom and

perfect in beauty," on account of the likeness his nature had to the divine nature. "Thou wast in the pleasures of the paradise of God," showing the happiness of the state of grace in which he was created, and the great favor he enjoyed with God. "Every precious stone was thy covering;" because he had a superabundance of the most perfect qualities, by which he surpassed his companions. "Thou wast a cherub stretching out thy wings, and covering, and I set thee in the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked in the midst of the stones of fire."[1] Oh, certainly happy was the state of that great spirit in the courts of the Lord!

Yet they were condemned to hell.

But, my dear brethren, this very Lucifer, with the third part of the host of heaven, is doomed to execution; and sentence is already passed on him, according to the same Prophet: "Thy inner parts were filled with iniquity, and thou hast sinned; and I cast thee out from the mountain of God, and destroyed thee, O covering cherub, out of the midst of the stones of fire. . . I have cast thee to the ground. . . Therefore I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, to devour thee, and I will make thee as ashes upon the earth in the sight of all that see thee; . . thou art brought to nothing, and thou shalt never be any more."[2] I will take away all beauty and glory from you, and from beautiful spirits you and all your companions shall be changed into hideous monsters, dragons, and demons. In a word, Lucifer and the third part of the angels were hurled down from heaven and condemned to the everlasting flames of hell.

By the infinitely merciful God.

What a fearful sentence that is! And what judge pronounced it? God. What? That God, whose very nature is goodness itself, of whom the Holy Ghost says that He hates nothing of all that He has made, and that He does not take pleasure in the destruction of His creatures; whose justice cannot allow any one to be punished more than he deserves; whose endless mercy makes Him bear for long years with even the most wicked sinners, and behave towards them with the greatest mildness and patience, so that, when He is at last compelled to punish them, the chastisement He inflicts on them is far less than they deserve? Could so merciful a God, I ask, pronounce such a

[1] Tu signaculum similitudinis, plenus sapientia, et perfectus decore, in deliciis paradis Dei fuisti; omnis lapis pretiosus operimentum tuum. Tu cherub extentus et protegens, et posui te in monte sancto Dei, inmedio lapidum ignitorum ambulasti.—Ezech. xxviii. 12–14.

[2] Repleta sunt interiora tua iniquitate, et peccasti; et ejeci te de monte Dei, et perdidi te, O Cherub protegens, de medio lapidum ignitorum; in terram projeci te: producam ergo ignem de medio tui, qui comedat te, et dabo te in cinerem super terram in conspectu omnium videntium te; nihili factus es, et non eris in perpetuum.—Ibid. 16–19.

severe sentence on those who were formerly His most beloved ministers and courtiers? Yes; and the sentence must be carried out on them; for they have deserved it. But, God of goodness, if they have sinned only once, must their sin be punished so quickly with the fire of hell? Remember that Thou art mildness and mercy itself, and if Thou wilt, Thou canst use more lenient measures towards them! Consider the high position they have occupied in Thy kingdom. One prince or king is deserving of more consideration than a thousand of the common people; and how much more an angel? Certainly, a difference should be made between the punishment inflicted on a noble prince, and that inflicted on a lowly slave or servant. Even according to our human laws, and the usual custom of the world, "one who excels in his art should not be condemned to death."[1] No matter; in spite of their greatness and excellence, they have to suffer the eternal punishment of hell.

And in great numbers, not one of them being spared.

Is there no chance for them, then, O Lord, and must their crime meet with such severe chastisement? Would it not suffice if the ring-leaders of them were punished as a warning to the others; or that every tenth one of them had to pay the penalty? Wilt Thou destroy such a vast number of heavenly spirits for one sin, and condemn to eternal death those beautiful master-pieces of Thy hands? Remember, my dear brethren, that, according to the testimony of Denis the Areopagite, a pupil of St. Paul, who was wrapt in spirit to the third heaven and saw what was going on there, and also according to the opinion of St. Thomas of Aquin, God has created the angels in such numbers that they outnumber all other creatures in the whole world, so that there are more angels than grains of sand on the sea-shore, stars in the firmament, leaves on the trees, and drops of water in the ocean. Such are the words of St. Denis.[2] Consider the length of time it would take to count the leaves on even one tree, and you may have some idea of the vast number of leaves on the trees in all the gardens and forests in the world. But the number of angels is much greater. Imagine, for you cannot see them on account of their great number, how many grains of sand there are in one little brook, and then think of the number there are in the Moselle, the Rhine, the Danube, in all the rivers of the earth and on the boundless sea-shore. Could any one count them all? But the number of angels is greater.

[1] Excellens in arte non debet mori.

[2] Angeli plures sunt quam stellæ cœli, quam arenæ maris, quam folia, quam herbæ.

Now the third part of them, with their leader, Lucifer, fell into sin; and, indeed, on one occasion St. Antony says that he saw the whole world filled with demons. But in spite of the fact that this severe sentence is passed on countless millions, the infinitely good and merciful God does not alter it; they must all without exception suffer eternal torments.

Without conceding them a moment for repentance.

But, O God, art Thou utterly inexorable? Suffer me to put forward a petition for those unhappy criminals. Do not visit them at once with the rigors of Thy justice. Give them only a moment's respite, that they may consider what they have done, and Thou wilt see how bitterly they will deplore their sin, how humbly they will implore Thy pardon. And if Thou grantest them that grace, oh, how grateful they will be to Thee for all eternity; how they will love, praise, honor, and bless Thee, and spread Thy glory throughout the world. But if Thou refusest it to them, they will rage against and curse Thee in despairing hatred forever; instead of giving Thee the honor and glory Thou mightest expect from them, they will blaspheme and revile Thee unceasingly; they will declare open war against Thee and Thy creatures, fill the whole world with idolatry and all kinds of vice, and by their temptations and snares drag down innumerable souls to hell with them, after having seduced them from Thy service, so that they will join with them in cursing and blaspheming Thee forever. According to our ideas, my dear brethren, these considerations should have moved the Almighty to have at least given the rebel angels time for repentance; but quite different are the inscrutable decrees of the most just God; in the very moment in which they sinned against their Creator they were all hurled into the abyss of hell, without having a moment of mercy accorded them. "I saw," said Our Lord to His Disciples, "Satan like lightning falling from heaven."[1]

They will be tortured forever for a momentary sinful thought.

And how long, O Lord, will they be tortured in that fire? When they have spent a hundred, a thousand, or a hundred thousand years therein, wilt Thou not then be satisfied, and have mercy on them? No, their punishment is not to be reckoned by years. Suppose, then, that they are to be tortured for as many millions of years as there are stars in the heavens, grains of sand on the sea-shore, and drops of water in the ocean, will not that be enough for one sin, that lasted but a moment, and wilt Thou not then receive them into Thy favor? No; they need never hope for pardon, eternal fire is their lot, and they must burn

[1] Videbam Satanam sicut fulgur de cœlo cadentem.—Luke x. 18.

therein forever without hope of redemption. And what was, then, their sin, O my God? What did they do to displease Thee? Theirs must have been a terrible and enormous crime? Do you wish to know what it was, my dear brethren? There is no doubt that the sin of the rebel angels was pride, and that they committed it by a single momentary thought. "And thy heart was lifted up with thy beauty," says the Prophet Ezechiel of Lucifer, "thou hast lost thy wisdom in thy beauty."[1] For, according to the general teaching of the fathers and of theologians, God revealed to the angels the future incarnation of His Son, whom they would have to acknowledge as Chief and to adore as their God and King; but Lucifer and his followers, considering the beauty and excellence of their nature, thought it beneath them to adore one of a nature so much inferior to theirs as human nature is; and therefore they came to the resolution of not adoring that Man, nor acknowledging Him as their lawful superior. Such was the crime of those princes of heaven which compelled the good and merciful God to punish them so severely that they were at once cast into hell without a moment's grace being given them.

From this we can see the malice of sin.

And what am I to conclude from all this? O sin, sin, how fearful must be thy malice! What an abomination in the sight of God must not even one wilful sin of thought be! And we make nothing of it! We commit sins of the kind, and laugh and joke and amuse ourselves with them, as if there were nothing in them. They are committed daily by the dozen, the hundred, the thousand, by us mortals, and that for something so worthless that we have reason to be ashamed of it. Besides that, we seek for the occasion of committing them, and when we have found it, we rejoice; nay, we boast of our sins sometimes, as if we had performed some heroic deed. What great harm is there, many a one thinks, to look at a person of the opposite sex with wilful desire, or to indulge with deliberate pleasure in a passing impure thought? What great harm is there in being proud and vain in dress, in order to please others, although occasion may thus be given to impure desires here and there? Ah! ask Lucifer, ask all the evil spirits in hell, and they will tell you what a great evil it is thus to offend God even for a moment. Therefore, either God must have punished far too severely that one proud thought in so many millions of angels, and be still more unjust

[1] Elevatum est cor tuum in decore tuo; perdidisti sapientiam tuam in decore tuo.—Ezech. xxviii. 17.

in making their punishment last forever; or else every mortal sin, even of thought or desire, must contain in itself a fearful amount of malice. Now the first statement cannot be true, for it is opposed to the infinite goodness and mercy of God, so that the latter must be true, namely, that the malice of mortal sin is incomprehensible, even when it is committed only in thought. Ah, Christians, if we had thought of that before, and taken it deeply to heart, is it likely, nay possible, that we should have committed so many mortal sins, so easily and for such worthless things, in thought, word, and deed? If we always thought of it with a lively faith, would it be possible for us ever again to dare to consent to sin in any circumstances? No; it would not be possible.

How we should fear offending God.

For, on further consideration, if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but at once cast them off forever out of His sight, have I not much more reason to fear if I should be guilty of the presumption of saying, thinking, or doing anything that he has forbidden under pain of mortal sin? If He has broken the precious golden vessels so quickly and cast them into the fire, what will He not do to the vile earthen ones? Every law makes a difference between the punishment to be inflicted on a noble and that which should be inflicted on one of the common people, although both are guilty of the same offence. Now, if the just God has acted with such severity towards those who were formerly His most noble and beloved courtiers, how can I, a poor, miserable mortal, who am nothing but dust and ashes, presume to hope that the same God will be more gracious to me, if I should offend Him grievously? If God was not in need of His angels, from whom He might have received such praise, honor, and service for all eternity, can I expect Him to have more consideration for me, a miserable worm of the earth, who, if I do my very best, can offer Him but a worthless service? In a word, if, as St. Bernard says, "God did not spare the proud angels, but cast them at once into hell, how much less will He spare you, who are but rottenness and worms?"[1] And yet, I dare to offend this most just God by mortal sin! O gracious Lord, protect me, save me from such presumption! And yet, how often have I not been guilty of it?

What punishment has man to

Alas, what am I to do? The angels in heaven have sinned against their God merely in thought, and they are condemned

[1] Si superbientibus angelis Deus non pepercit, quanto magis tibi, putredo et vermis?—S. Bern., Serm. 1, de advent.

expect, whose sins are so manifold.

to hell forever; what sort of a hell have I, wretched sinner that I am, to expect, who have so grievously offended the same God in thought, word, and deed? The angels sinned by a thought which they could not carry into effect; but I have completed by shameless deeds my unchaste, brutish, revengeful, proud, avaricious, unjust, and envious thoughts and desires. The angels sinned only once, and that for the first time; and the Almighty in His anger did not give them a moment to repent; I have committed the same grievous transgressions twice, ten times, a hundred times, and have added sin to sin. I must acknowledge that I am one of those wicked ones of whom David says, "God is not before his eyes; his ways are filthy at all times."[1] Yes, my ways have indeed been filthy from the moment when I first came to the use of reason! I have defiled myself with sin in the houses in which I have lived, in the schools in which I was taught, in the gardens in which I amused myself, in the rooms I occupied; nay, I have desecrated by my sins the temples and churches consecrated to God in which I appeared, the holy sacraments I received when I was in the state of sin, and even the very confessional in which I could have cleansed myself from sin, when I appeared in it without true sorrow and purpose of amendment, or when I wilfully concealed a mortal sin through shame. My ways are filthy at all times: during the holy season of Advent, during Lent, in Holy Week, at Easter, and at Pentecost, at all times I have sinned. My Lord and my God, if I had been born in this world not to serve Thee and to keep Thy commandments, but to offend and despise Thee, could I have led a worse life? Years of my youth that are past and gone, show me a single day that I have spent without sin! Holy law of God, show me a single commandment that I have not broken! Alas, I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed! I have sinned with my eyes, my ears, my tongue, my hands, and all my senses. "My iniquities have overtaken me, and I was not able to see. They are multiplied above the hairs of my head."[2] My poor soul, thou art like Job on the dunghill; "From the sole of the foot, even to the top of the head,"[3] thou art covered with a loathsome ulcer! Hear, ye reprobate spirits, and be astonished; I, a miserable mortal, have committed more sin than many thousands of you together; and

[1] Non est Deus in conspectu ; ejus inquinatæ sunt viæ illius in omni tempore.—Ps. Hebr. x. 5.

[2] Comprehenderunt me iniquitates meæ, et non potui ut viderem ; multiplicatæ sunt super capillos capitis mei.—Ps. xxxix. 13. [3] A planta pedis usque ad verticem.—Job. ii. 7.

if one deliberate, sinful thought was enough to turn so many countless millions of you into demons, what sort of a hideous demon must I then be in the sight of the God whom I have so often offended? If I only committed twenty sins in my life, they would be enough to turn twenty bright angels, if they could be guilty of them, into frightful devils; what a filthy object my soul must then be in the sight of God, since my sins are beyond counting?

And who knows, by faith, of the punishment of the angels.

Those angels are now in hell, and have been there for many thousand years, for one momentary sin. O my God, where am I? Do I still live? Am I still in Thy presence, before Thy face? Can I still hope for mercy and grace from Thee? Dare I still raise my eyes to heaven, when I think of the terrible but at the same time most just revenge Thou hast taken on Thy angels? They have sinned, it is true; but only once, and before they knew anything about hell being the punishment Thou hast decreed against sin; before they had the least idea of such a thing as an eternal fire, and before any example of a reprobate sinner was given them, by which they might have profited. I (foolish and presumptuous mortal that I am!) have wantonly contemned a hundred times Thy holy law, and have committed sin after sin, although an infallible faith teaches me that the pains of hell are eternal, and reminds me that I must burn in them forever, if I offend God and do not keep His commandments. But I have cared little for the teaching of faith; I have sinned often and grievously, in spite of the example of the angels, in spite of being assured by faith that the same punishment is in store for me. I have sinned, in spite of the many examples of men like myself whom I know to be now in hell on account of their sins, as I read in Thy own written word and in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, and learn from different examples. Thou hast not given the rebel angels the least remission of their only sin, which Thou hast refused to forgive; but Thou hast often pardoned me in the sacrament of penance; and nevertheless I have not feared to relapse into the same grievous sins. Nay, since I knew that Thy goodness and wonderful patience and mildness did not punish me after the first, second, third, twentieth, or fiftieth sin, I have been so ungrateful and presumptuous as to take advantage of Thy patience, and to sin all the more boldly.

Humble confession

And finally, O Lord, if I had been present with all my sins on my soul, at the time when Thou wert punishing the rebel

of our malice and acknowledgment of God's mercy.

angels, and had seen millions of them falling like lightning from heaven into the abyss of hell, how would I not have trembled with fear and anguish? Woe to me, I would have thought, if such a severe punishment is inflicted on the princes of heaven, because they have sinned but once in thought, what will become of me, a miserable and vile mortal, after so many horrible crimes? Now faith represents to me the terrors of Thy vengeance on the angels, and says to me, you see what happened to them? Is it possible for me, then, O Lord, not to despair of grace or pardon from Thee? And, indeed, I should despair, if I considered only my own presumption and wickedness, and did not remember that Thy infinite mercy towards us poor mortals is immeasurably greater than our malice. Just reason should I have for despair, if I did not keep before my eyes Thee, my Redeemer, who wast crucified for me, and (what Thou didst not do for the rebel angels) hast offered me the infinite merits of Thy precious Blood to wash out all my sins, if I wish to return to Thee with a contrite heart, and to do sincere penance. Ah yes, that is the only ground of my hope and confidence! Strengthened and comforted by that hope, I prostrate myself at Thy feet, and acknowledge, in the deepest humility and with sorrow of heart, that I have often and grievously offended Thee. I have sinned, O Jesus my Saviour; but that very name of Thine is a source of consolation to me! My sins are without number; but pardon me this once, not because I deserve it, but because Thou art a God of great mercy, who hast suffered death for me on the cross. I freely acknowledge that I have deserved, not one, but a thousand hells. Alas, how many thousands of angels and of men like myself are now burning in hell, although they have not committed the half, or the hundredth part of the sins by which I have offended Thee. O terrible and at the same time most just and righteous judgment of my God! Thou hast decreed to show more to one than to another the mercy and grace Thou owest to none. Thy all-wise Providence has resolved from all eternity to punish with hell one man, as Thou didst the rebel angels, immediately on his committing the first mortal sin; nor is there any injustice done him, for he deserves it; another Thou wilt allow to commit five sins, but no more; another twenty, or a hundred, or a thousand, or many thousand, without condemning him to hell; and Thou hast determined to do so, because Thou art pleased to show to one more than to another the mercy Thou owest to no sinner. For my part, I must ac-

knowledge that I am amongst those who have been most fortunate in this respect. I thank Thee most humbly, O God of mercy, that Thou hast borne with my many and grievous sins, and hast deferred for me the damnation that I have deserved like so many others!

Repentance for past sins.

And for that very reason I now more vehemently bewail my malice in offending Thee, my God, who hast been so good to me! It is now time and more than time for me to cease offending Thee, and not merely to avoid ever sinning again, but also to get rid of the weight of my sins, the measure of which may even now be wanting only one to be completely filled; to make a good confession, to renew my contrition every day, to give alms to the needy according to my means, to practise Christian humility and modesty, to fast and otherwise mortify myself voluntarily, to bear patiently the injuries offered me by others, and all the trials and crosses Thou wilt send me, (ah, would that I had done so long since!) and to love Thee constantly above all things. For that Thou hast spared me in spite of my many sins should not encourage me in the presumptuous hope that, if I again dare to sin, Thou wilt be equally merciful to me. Perhaps the next sin (grant, O God, that I may die even in this very moment before committing it!) may be my last, after which Thou hast determined in Thy inscrutable decrees to give me no further time for repentance, and to hurl me into hell with the rebel angels.

Purpose of amendment.

O no, my God, with Thy fatherly help I will not sin again! The example of the fallen angels will make me humble and cautious, so that I shall fly all dangerous occasions of sin. For if they were not safe from sin even in heaven, how can I, a weak mortal inclined to evil, hope to escape it in that company and society, amidst those allurements, occasions, and dangers in which sad experience has taught me that I am only too apt to sin? No, O Lord, I will fly even the shadow of sin, and to that end I will keep a guard on my senses, especially on my eyes, ears, and tongue, that I may neither hear, see, nor say anything that might give me occasion to transgress Thy commands. "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear,"[1] is my humble prayer with Thy servant David. Thou hast now filled me with Thy fear in the meditation of the fall of the angels, and that fear has taken possession of my mind; grant that it may also penetrate the very marrow of my bones, so that not a member of my body

[1] Confige timore tuo carnes meas.—Ps. cxviii. 120.

may ever again place me in danger of offending Thee. I will love Thee, O God of all beauty, who art worthy of all love for Thy own sake alone! And I will fear Thee, too, O God of justice, and by that constant love and fear I hope and trust one day to arrive at the place from which Thou didst expel the angels, that is, heaven, where I shall be able to praise Thy mercy forever. Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON REPENTANCE FOR SIN BECAUSE IT OFFENDS OUR HEAVENLY FATHER.

Subject.

He who commits a grievous sin hates, grieves, and dishonors God, his heavenly Father, an ingratitude and a wickedness that cannot be sufficiently deplored.—*Preached on the feast of SS. Simon and Jude.*

Text.

Qui me odit, et Patrem meum odit.—John xv. 23.
"He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also."

Introduction.

Christ Our Lord, in order to show His Apostles the extent of the malice with which the envious Jews hated and persecuted Him everywhere, makes use of the words I have quoted: "He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also;" and His meaning is, that there is nothing more terrible than to hate His heavenly Father. Sinner, whoever you are, you are guilty of that malice and presumption whenever you commit a mortal sin; you hate and persecute Christ, your Saviour, like the Jews, the high priests, and the Scribes, inasmuch as you renew the cause of the death of Christ. But, cruel as your wickedness is, it does not finish there; you also hate and grieve His heavenly Father, who has adopted you as His child; and that, as you must acknowledge when you consider the matter reasonably, is something so terrible that it ought to move you to repent of and detest your sins at once. Such is the object of my sermon to-day, by way of meditation for me, and you, and all sinners. Namely,

Plan of Discourse.

He who commits a grievous sin hates, grieves, and dishonors God, his heavenly Father, an ingratitude and a wickedness that cannot be sufficiently deplored. Such is the whole subject of this meditation.

Heavenly Father, illumine the hearts of all here present with the light of the Holy Ghost, that they who have sinned may acknowledge their ingratitude and wickedness, and may do sincere penance; and that all others, knowing the malice of sin, may come to the irrevocable determination of never offending Thee. This we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Thy Son, and of our holy guardian angels.

Nature implants in every child a special love and reverence for his father.

The sweetest and most gracious of all names is that of father, and when uttered by a child, it denotes a special affection, confidence, and reverence, as well as the tenderest love. Amongst all the obligations which can bind us to honor and love another in this world the greatest and most just is that which binds a child to his father, and it is an obligation that can never be sufficiently fulfilled, much less cancelled, even by the greatest services and the most heartfelt gratitude. For, if the son were to show his love for his father to the extent of giving his life for him, in order to save him from death; he would not yet have sufficiently repaid the benefit he owes him from whom he has received his life. For the power and strength by which he is able to save his father's life is a blessing that he owes originally to his father next to God. Hence the philosopher Aristotle says: "we can never make an adequate return to God and to our parents;"[1] and, he continues, this obligation of holding one's father in all possible honor is implanted in every man by nature itself so deeply, that he who denies or refuses to acknowledge it should be brought to a sense of duty, not by argument, as if he were a reasonable man, but by blows, as if he were a fool.

He who raised his hand against his father was always held in execration as a monster.

From the very beginning of the world, there never was a people, even amongst heathens and idolaters, living in well-ordered community, who did not look on a child who dared to grieve and offend his father as a monster deserving of execration. Already in ancient times legislators had established all kinds of punishment for different crimes; there was one punishment for murder-

[1] Deo et parentibus nunquam satis rependi potest.

ers, another for robbers, another for adulterers, and so on; but for those who dared to lay violent hands on their father or mother there is no punishment on record. And why? Is not parricide a far more horrible crime than thieving, adultery, or murder? Did they, perhaps, wish to allow such criminals to remain unpunished? No; but they looked on it as impossible that a reasoning being could so far forget himself as to be guilty of such wickedness, and therefore they thought it unnecessary to legislate against a crime of that kind.

And was punished in a special manner, by human law.

But as time rolled on, and people found out that not only was such a crime possible, but that it was actually committed, the ancient Romans made a special law, according to which a parricide was condemned to be tied up in a leathern sack with a live ape, a viper, and a cock, and to be thrown into the sea, as one who was unworthy of looking up to heaven, or of remaining on earth. Mark, my dear brethren, the companions that the wretch was compelled to associate with; an ape, because that animal has the outward semblance of a man, but is in reality an unreasoning brute, so that the parricide might learn that he had only the appearance of man, but was really lower than the brute beast. The viper, the most poisonous of all serpents, is a symbol of the odious vice of ingratitude, for it tears open the body of its own mother at its birth. The cock symbolizes shamelessness and audacity. Thus, according to that law, the wretch had to die with those beasts as his companions, to signify that he was far more ungrateful and shameless than any other monster on earth.

By the divine law.

The almighty God, in order to show His detestation of such wicked children, commanded in the Book of Exodus that he who raised his hand against father or mother should be at once punished with death: "He that striketh his father or mother shall be put to death."[1] Nay, He decreed the same punishment against those who dared even to curse their parents: "He that curseth his father or mother shall die the death."[2] And death was the least punishment decreed against disobedience to one's parents: "If a man have a stubborn and unruly son, who will not hear the commandments of his father or mother," such are the words of the divine law in the Book of Deuteronomy, "the people of the city shall stone him, and he shall die, that you may take away the evil out of the midst of you, and all Israel hearing

[1] Qui percusserit patrem suum, aut matrem, morte moriatur.—Exod. xxi. 15.
[2] Qui maledixerit patri suo, vel matri, morte moriatur.—Ibid. 17.

it may be afraid."[1] I have spoken of this more at length when explaining the duties of children to their parents. And on what is this grave obligation of the child towards his father founded? On the fact that the child owes his life to the father as far as his mortal body is concerned. And is that all? Yes, there is absolutely no other reason. And for such a small benefit as that must the child remain under such deep obligations to his father during his whole life, and must such severe punishments be decreed against those who offend their parents?

God is our Father.

O Christians, think of this. How great must not then be our obligation to love and honor that Father of whom Christ Our Saviour said to His Apostles before His ascension, and in their persons to all of us: "I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God;"[2] that Father to whom we daily pray, "Our Father who art in heaven." For the great God is in the proper sense of the word our Father, from whom we receive our whole being, natural as well as supernatural. He is our Father according to nature, for He has created us to His own divine image, and has given us life. "Have we not all one Father," asks the Prophet Malachias, "hath not one God created us?"[3] Does He not feed and preserve us all as His children? He is our Father according to grace, for by Jesus Christ, our elder Brother, He has adopted us by a new birth in baptism as His children, and has made us lawful heirs to His property. Of this adoption St. Paul writes to the Galatians, in order to give them an idea of the great happiness they enjoyed, and of the dignity to which they were raised: "But when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son made of a woman, made under the law." To what end? "That we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God hath sent the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba, Father. And if a son, an heir also through God."[4] "O wonderful condescension of the divine goodness," I must exclaim with St. Gregory, which has raised us poor mortals to such a dignity; "we are not worthy to

[1] Si genuerit homo filium contumacem et protervum, qui non audiat patris aut matris imperium. . . lapidibus eum obruet populus civitatis, et morietur, ut auferatis malum de medio vestri, et universus Israel audiens pertimescat.—Deut. xxi. 18, 21.

[2] Ascendo ad Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum. Deum meum et Deum vestrum.—John xx. 17.

[3] Numquid non pater unus omnium nostrum? numquid non Deus unus creavit nos?—Malach. ii. 10.

[4] Ubi venit plenitudo temporis, misit Deus filium suum factum ex muliere, factum sub lege. . . ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemus; quoniam autem estis filii, misit Deus Spiritum filii sui in corda vestra, clamantem: Abba, Pater. . . Quod si filius, et hæres per Deum.—Gal. iv. 4.–7.

be His slaves, and He has made us His friends!"[1] nay, His children. "Behold," says St. John with astonishment in his First Epistle, "what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons of God."[2] Certainly, there is not one of us mortals who should dare to think that, after having been born a child of wrath and malediction, he would be made a child of God, and would be able to call God his Father; no one, I say, would ever dare to aspire to that dignity, if God Himself had not commanded us to call Him by that sweet name. "Thus, therefore, shall you pray," says Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew, "Our Father who art in heaven."[3] And therefore the priest, before saying this prayer in the Holy Mass, makes confession of our unworthiness in the following words: "instructed by Thy saving precepts, and following Thy divine directions, we presume to say: Our Father who art in heaven."[4] Consequently God is our Father.

And an infinitely better Father, and more deserving of love, than our earthly fathers, as far as creation is concerned.

And what kind of a Father is He? O ye mortal and earthly fathers, no matter how great is your natural love and goodness towards your children, no matter how just your claims to their reverence, obedience, and love, yet, in comparison to our heavenly Father, you must humbly acknowledge that you do not even deserve the name; for your only title to it is the fact that your children owe their mortal bodies to you, which, as St. Thomas says, "are the source of sin, the cause of concupiscence, and the origin of guilt."[5] And not even that much would they owe to you without the help of God, by whose power all things exist. As far as the nobler part of our nature, the soul, is concerned, in which the life and substance of man principally consist, you have had nothing whatever to do with that; the only Author and Father of the soul is God, our heavenly Father, who created it out of nothing, without the intervention of any creature, and made it to His image and likeness. This beautiful spirit is breathed forth from the mouth of God and is endowed with a wonderful memory, and with understanding and will, so that it moves the body and governs it as its servant. You must say to your children, like the heroic mother of the Machabees, when she was encouraging her seven sons to bear their torments with fortitude.

[1] O mira divinæ bonitatis dignatio! servi digni non sumus, et amici vocamur!

[2] Videte qualem charitatem dedit nobis Pater, ut filii Dei nominemur et simus.—I. John iii. 1.

[3] Sic ergo vos orabitis: Pater noster qui es in cœlis.—Matt. vi. 9.

[4] Præceptis salutaribus moniti, et divina institutione formati, audemus dicere: Pater noster qui es in cœlis.

[5] Materiam corporis causam libidinis, originem reatus.

lift up your eyes to heaven, my children, "for I neither gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, neither did I frame the limbs of every one of you; but the Creator of the world, that formed the nativity of man."[1] I am your mother according to the flesh; but the noblest part of you, your immortal soul, is a masterpiece of God, your heavenly Father.

As far as preservation is concerned.

When you, O fathers, have contributed your share to the existence of your children, what do you do to preserve them in life? To answer in a few words, nothing at all. Nor is it in your power to prolong their lives for a single instant; for they must depend altogether on the will of their heavenly Father, who can take their lives away when and how He pleases, and who every moment gives them, as it were, a new life by preserving them. It is true that by your daily care and labor you provide for their temporal wants; but even these, again, are free gifts of their heavenly Father, and if He did not bestow them on you, all your toil and diligence would be fruitless, so that, although you were to work day and night, you and your children would at last die of hunger. Therefore you must cry out daily to your Father in heaven, "Give us this day our daily bread." Besides, it is principally during their childhood and early youth that you have to provide for your children; when they have once grown up, they are no longer in need of you. But God never for a moment lays down His fatherly office; from the first breath your children draw, down to the last moment of their lives, He never ceases bestowing on them the protection and care which are so necessary to them. In all places, and where it is very often impossible for you to look after them; at all times, in the dark night as well as in the clear day, the Eye of His Providence watches over their welfare and safety. If your children had to depend on your care alone, how often might they not have broken their necks by a sudden mishap; how often might they not have been drowned, or striken by a thunder-bolt, or, when they were actually in the state of sin, dragged off by the demon to hell? It was God, their heavenly Father, who warded off all those dangers from them and from you, when you were not even thinking of them, and who every moment heaped benefits on them. It is God, their heavenly Father, who has given to each and every one of your children the infallible assurance that, if a mother were to forget her son, and not to have pity on him,

[1] Neque enim ego spiritum et animam donavi vobis et vitam, et singulorum membra non ego ipsa compegi; sed enim mundi Creator, qui formavit hominis nativitatem. — II. Machab. vii. 22, 23.

"yet will not I forget thee: behold I have graven thee in my hands. Thy walls are always before my eyes." [1]

And training.

Your greatest care, O fathers, is devoted to the perishable bodies and the temporal welfare of your children; your efforts are directed to giving them a good training according to the ideas of the world; and it often happens that you thus murder their souls most cruelly, inasmuch as you do not keep them from the dangerous occasions of sin, nor punish their faults as you ought, but train them up by word and example to all kinds of vanity and luxury, to lying and deceit, to cursing and swearing, and other abominable vices, so that it would have been far better for them to have been brought up in a wilderness by a brute beast, than by you, and they will one day be compelled to curse you as the cause of their eternal damnation. There are some of you fathers who, besides neglecting the souls of your children, treat them as if they were dogs, and beat them as if they were beasts of burden, punishing them for faults of which you yourselves are guilty. There are some of you fathers who, by constant idleness, unnecessary expense in dress and useless entertainments, gambling and drinking, steal away the bread out of the mouths of your children, and reduce them to poverty, so that, instead of loving and honoring you, as they ought, they will curse and revile you. Thus you destroy, not only the souls of your children, but also their bodies, as far as their temporal prosperity is concerned. Oh, how much better is the Father they have in heaven, who always provides for the welfare of their bodies by giving them the necessaries of life, but especially is concerned for the welfare of their immortal souls! To this end are directed all the arrangements of His all-wise Providence; those good inspirations, which He gives them partly immediately, and partly by means of the holy angels whom He has appointed to be their protectors and guardians in the pilgrimage of this life; those salutary exhortations and warnings which He places on the lips of preachers and confessors, that they may deter them from sin and lead them on the path of virtue to heaven. Such, too, is His intention in visiting them with crosses and trials, for these are all so many proofs of the love of His fatherly heart, and He wishes thereby to humble them, or, if they are in the state of sin, to bring them to a knowledge of themselves, that they may return by a speedy repentance to their Father who is

[1] Ego tamen non oblviscar tui; ecce in manibus meis descripsi te: muri tui coram oculis meis semper.—Isa. xlix. 15, 16.

in heaven or, if they are in the state of grace, to try their patience, and to increase their virtues and merits.

As far as their inheritance is concerned.

Finally, what sort of an inheritance have your children to expect from you, O fathers, on account of which they should be under such great obligations to you? Does it not often consist of ill-gotten gains, which they must restore, if they do not wish to lose their souls? Does it not often consist of debts, which they will hardly ever be able to pay? Is it not often a law-suit that eats up all their savings? Is it not sometimes mourning and lamentation, and nothing else, that you have to leave them when you die? But even supposing that you leave them spacious lands and vineyards, full granaries and cellars and well-furnished coffers, so that they can lead a comfortable life, what is it worth, after all? It is certainly a gift of God, who has blessed you with temporal prosperity; but what is it, I ask, when compared to the inheritance their heavenly Father has in store for them? Eternal riches and treasures, eternal joys and pleasures, eternal and endless goods are what He will give His chosen children. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him."[1] Therefore, I say again, earthly fathers, that you are not deserving of the name when compared with God, our heavenly Father. And that is the meaning of those words of Our Lord in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "And call none your father upon earth; for one is your Father, who is in heaven,"[2] as if to say, when you are comparing one man with another, then, indeed, you may say, this man is my father, but when you are making a comparison between God and man, then he whom you call your father is not deserving of the name, because he has contributed but very little to your existence, while God gives you a temporal and eternal, a spiritual and a material, a natural and a supernatural life. Therefore one is our Father, who is in heaven.

It is a fearful crime, then, to dishonor and offend this heavenly Father.

What conclusion are we to draw from this, my dear brethren? Certainly the following, which no one can reasonably dispute: if a child is bound by a grievous obligation to obey his mortal father humbly in all things, although he receives so little from him, to honor him under all circumstances, and to love him sincerely; if it is a universally received opinion that, no matter

[1] Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, quæ præparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum.—I. Cor. ii. 9.

[2] Patrem nolite vocare vobis super terram; unus est enim Pater vester, qui in cœlis est. —Matt. xxiii. 9.

what services he renders his father, he can never discharge fully this obligation; how much more, then, are we not bound, nay, is not our obligation infinitely greater, to show to our heavenly Father the homage of our most punctual obedience, our deepest reverence, and our most tender love? And if the very name of father aggravates the malice of an insult or injury offered to him who bears it by his son or daughter, so much that it is looked on as intolerable; if all human and divine laws are unanimous in condemning as a monster and in sentencing to death by stoning, drowning, or burning him who dares to raise his hand against his father to injure him, not to speak of murdering him; if an undutiful child is cursed by God Himself; where, then, can we find words expressive enough to describe the abominable wickedness of the wretch who ventures to dishonor, grieve, and insult his most kind and loving heavenly Father? "Ah," says St. Augustine, "what a cruel thing it is to offend," to insult and rebel against "such a Father, or to do anything against His will!" [1]

That is done by every one who commits sin.

Hear, O sinner; such an undutiful child have you been, whenever you committed a mortal sin. Instead of obeying your heavenly Father with child-like submission you have rebelled against Him, and said by your actions: I will not do as Thou commandest me. In place of the filial reverence you owe Him, you have kicked against Him like a stubborn horse, and have trampled His law and His inspirations under foot, thus showing that you did not care anything for Him, and that His threats and commands were alike disregarded by you. Instead of loving Him, as a child should, you have planted as many daggers in His fatherly heart as you have committed sins; and you have torn to pieces before His very face the beautiful robe that He gave you in baptism, as a sign that He wished to adopt you as His child; and thus you gave Him to understand plainly enough that you did not desire to be His child. Like the prodigal in the Gospel, you have run away from Him into a strange land, and there you have attached yourself to another father, whose child you preferred to be, namely to him of whom Christ says in the Gospel to the Pharisees: "You are of your father the devil." [2] See what a fine exchange you have made, and whom you have perferred to serve as your father, instead of your loving heavenly Father! In his service you have squandered all your patrimony,

[1] Talem Patrem offendere, contra ejus voluntatem aliquid committere, quam est crudele!
[2] Vos ex patre diabolo estis.—John viii. 44.

your supernatural gifts and graces, the merits you had gained, and the inheritance that awaited you in heaven. And all that you have done, not like the prodigal, in a foreign country, out of your Father's sight, but before His very face, under His all-seeing eye, which nothing can escape. Ah, how cruel thus to insult such a loving Father! What does your heart say to you, when you think of this? Is it possible that it does not burst with sorrow?

What ingratitude and wickedness in the sinner.

Ah, my Lord and my God, I am that unthankful, undutiful, and heartless son, who have so often and for such a long time treated Thee so cruelly! How great and excessive my presumption! How great and excessive the patience with which Thou hast borne with my wantonness for so many years! If Thou hadst never taken the least care of me, if Thou hadst allowed me to be born among heathens and Turks, even then I should have been bound to serve Thee with all humility and devotion. If Thou hadst made me poor and miserable, blind, crippled, or lame, I should still be obliged to honor Thee as my supreme God and to love Thee with all my heart. But I have treated most shamefully a Father such as Thou art, who hast loved me so tenderly in preference to so many thousands, and given me such extraordinary graces, as if I were the favored Benjamin among Thy children! Oh, what cruelty I have been guilty of! When children act undutifully, people say to them, fie! are you not ashamed of your conduct? You have most loving and respectable parents; your father and mother have spared neither trouble nor expense to procure for you a becoming position in life, and now you act so undutifully towards them! What a shame for you! Ah, my soul, art thou not ashamed? Thou hast a good, kind Father in heaven, who has, so to speak, labored most indefatigably and worn Himself out for thy sake and for thy eternal advantage, and thou hast offended Him most grossly, and insulted and grieved Him. How canst thou dare to address this God as thy Father, and to say to Him, "Our Father who art in heaven?" With what kind of a faith canst thou say, "I believe in God the Father?" Must thou not exclaim with the humble St. Bernard, "how can I, such a wicked son, dare to raise my eyes to such a good Father?"[1]

Who has, therefore, just reason for bewail-

O eyes, where are your tears? For what will you shed them, if not for this? There was once a youth who dared, in a fit of passion (ah, I burn with shame when I think of it!) to spurn his

[1] Quanam fronte attollo oculos ad vultum Patris tam boni, tam malus filius?

ing his sins. Shown by a simile.

mother from him with his foot. When his passion was over he realized what he had done, and, full of shame and repentance, went to St. Antony of Padua, and disclosed to him in confession the sin he had committed. The holy man reproved the youth in these few words, which showed, however, the zeal with which he was inflamed: "Ah, my son," said he, "to spurn your own mother with your feet! You could not treat a dog worse! A child to behave thus to the mother that bore him! The foot that committed such a crime deserves to be cut off, so that not the least use can be made of it in future." These few words sank deep into the heart of the young man, and the consideration of his abominable wickedness filled him with such an excess of sorrow that, when he went home, he actually took an axe, and, laying the offending foot on a chair, cut it off, the loss of blood ensuing thereon causing him to faint away and fall to the ground half dead. Antony having been sent for to witness this tragedy, reproved the intemperate zeal of the young man, and, taking the foot in his hand, applied it to the limb, to which it immediately became miraculously united. O my heavenly Father, if I had a proper knowledge of the wickedness I am guilty of when I spurn Thee from me so often, what vengeance should I not take on myself? I should tear out the eyes that so often offend Thee by impure looks. I should cut out the tongue that insults Thee by cursing and swearing, by slandering my neighbor and giving him scandal, by unchaste words and songs. I should cut off both hands that offend Thee by thieving and taking improper liberties. I should lop off the feet that bear me into dangerous company, where I so often do what Thou knowest, in despite of Thee. I should burn to ashes my whole body, which has insulted Thee by all kinds of vice. But all this would not be enough to restore Thy honor, which I have lessened by my misconduct. Nor dost Thou require it of me; for Thou art satisfied with a child-like and loving repentance on my part.

And should bewail them all the more, because his heavenly Father is ready to receive him with love.

Children who have committed a grievous fault do not dare to present themselves before their father, lest they should be punished; if they hear his voice, they run away and hide, so that he may not see them; during the night they dream of nothing but rods and whips with which their fault is to be punished; and if the least noise is made at the door of their room, they start up in a fright, thinking it is their father, who is coming to give them what they deserve. And Thou, my heavenly Father, how art

Thou disposed towards me, after I have so recklessly and wantonly offended Thee for so many years? Dare I appear in Thy sight? O the unspeakable goodness and love of Thy fatherly heart! Thou awaitest me, ready to receive me when I return to Thee; Thou callest out to me and invitest me to look at Thee with a repentant heart and with child-like love. I see Thee already (as Thou Thyself assurest me in the parable of the prodigal son) running towards me with outstretched arms to embrace me and to press me to Thy fatherly bosom, not otherwise than if I had always been Thy most obedient and loving child. To show in the sight of heaven Thy joy at my return, Thou preparest for me a public and most magificent banquet, in which Thou givest me, not a fatted calf, but the Flesh and Blood of Thy own Son, our elder Brother, Jesus Christ, as my food and drink, with the assurance that Thou hast forgotten forever all my grievous transgressions against Thee, and that Thou wilt henceforth look on me and love me as Thy dear child. O my heart, how dost thou not break with sorrow at having offended and grieved such a good and loving Father! Eyes, turn yourselves into fountains of tears, that I may truly say, with the penitent David: "My eyes have sent forth springs of water, because they have not kept Thy law."[1] Shameless face of mine, cover thyself with confusion;[2] life of mine, be wasted away in sorrow, and my remaining years, be ye spent in sighs.[3]

Sorrow, prayer for pardon, and purpose of amendment, after the example of a true penitent.

Do you, my tongue, continue to cry out with that penitent Count of Anjou, "Father, I have sinned."[4] I have offered Thee many insults! I have raised my wicked hand against Thee! This penitent count was going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and he took with him, as the companions of his journey, two pious servants of God. Before setting out, he made them promise on oath that they would do all he should command them, a promise which they religiously kept. When they came to the holy sepulchre, he ordered one of them to tie a rope round his neck and to drag him to the sepulchre, while the other had to scourge him until he fell exhausted to the ground. While doing this penance his only cry was: "Father, I have sinned." I have committed a most horrible crime! In this grave lay my Father, whose life I have taken; this grave-stone

[1] Exitus aquarum deduxerunt oculi mei: quia non custodierunt legem tuam.—Ps. cxviii. 136.

[2] Operuit confusio faciem meam. -Ibid. lxviii. 8.

[3] Defecit in dolore vita mea, et anni mei in gemitibus.—Ibid. xxx. 11.

[4] Pater, peccavi.

reproaches me with the murder of my Father, whom I have slain by my sins! He then sank to the ground, not on account of the pain caused by the scourging, (for his companions, moved with pity and shedding copious tears, struck him as gently as possible!) but solely at the thought inspired by the words, "Father, I have sinned." Alas, he would say, "I have sinned grievously and murdered Thee! What have I done? O heavenly Father, if I dare to call Thee still by that name, for I have been a most undutiful and wicked son, with contrite and sorrowful heart, prostrate before Thee, I cry out to Thee: Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee; I bewail bitterly, not my own misfortune, great as it is, but the fact that I have repeatedly offended Thee, my most loving Father. I am not worthy to be called Thy son, because I have not the heart of a son. I do not deserve to be looked on by Thee with the eyes of a father; nevertheless, do not consider my wickedness, but the infinite mercy of Thy fatherly heart. Do not be to me a stern judge, although I deserve that Thou shouldst be so to me, but be a good Father according to Thy mercy. If Thou wilt punish me for my sins, I acknowledge that I have deserved it a thousand times; and behold, I submit myself completely to Thy fatherly chastisements; punish me as Thou wilt and as Thou knowest to be for my advantage; but one thing I beg of Thee: give to me and preserve in me the heart of a true child, so that I may serve Thee in future with all submission, not so much through fear of punishment or hope of reward, as through perfect love for Thee, so that I may always be most obedient to Thy holy will, in all circumstances, for the remainder of my life. Amen."

On the Loss of one's Soul as a Motive for Contrition, see the preceding First Part. On account of Presumption in Despising God, see the Second Part. On account of the Goodness and Mercy of God towards the Sinner, see the Eleventh and Twelfth Sermons in this Part. On account of Offending God, who is present everywhere, see the Fifty-seventh sermon in this Part. On account of Provoking the Anger of the Almighty God of Infinite Goodness, who is worthy of all Love, see the following Fourth Part. On account of Losing Heaven and running the risk of Eternal Torments, see the Fifth Part. On account of again Crucifying our Saviour, see the Sixth Part.

ON THE PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

TWENTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE NATURE OF THIS PURPOSE.

Subject.

He who wishes to rise from spiritual death in the sacrament of penance must have: 1. A firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins; 2. A firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins completely and for all time.—*Preached on the fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Resedit qui erat mortuus et cœpit loqui.—Luke vii. 15.
"He that was dead sat up, and began to speak."

Introduction.

These were proofs that established beyond a doubt that the young man who was dead was really restored to life: "He that was dead sat up," and, that no one might think it was a delusion, "he began to speak," as if to say to the people who were standing round: see, I can move; I can speak to you; I am restored to life. Would to God, my dear brethren, that all who are dead were thus restored to life! I am alluding now to sinners whose souls are dead, and who try to recover sanctifying grace in the sacrament of penance. Would to God, I say, that the amendment of their lives were always there to prove that their resurrection was not a mere delusion! But how many are deluded on this point! How many are there of whom we might say with truth, when they come out of the confessional, what we read in the Gospel of to-day: "Behold, a dead man was carried out"? He went in dead, and he comes out in the same state; his repentance was only an apparent

one. And this occurs either because a grievous and wilful fault has been committed in the examen of conscience, or through want of a true supernatural sorrow for sin, of which we have already treated; or else through want of a firm purpose of amendment, which is the third requisite to a good confession. The nature of this purpose shall form the subject of to-day's instruction, as follows:

Plan of Discourse.

He who wishes to rise from spiritual death in the sacrament of penance must have a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins, as we shall see in the first part. He must have a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sins completely and for all time, as we shall see in the second part.

That all sinners may have this purpose, we beg of Thee, O Lord, whose word can call the dead to life, to grant us all Thy grace through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

Repentance is of no avail without a firm purpose of avoiding all mortal sin.

Just as true contrition does not consist in words that are uttered by the mouth, whether by heart or read out of a prayer-book, nor in sighs and tears, but in an act of the will by which, after having acknowledged the malice of my sins, I hate and detest them all from a supernatural motive, and wish from my heart that I had never committed them, so also the purpose of amendment that I make in presence of God and of my confessor does not consist in the words I speak, but in an earnest and present determination of my will, for a supernatural motive, not to commit again a single mortal sin in any way whatever, for the sake of any person, pleasure, or profit, and to use all the necessary efforts to carry out this determination. If this firm purpose is wanting, repentance is of no avail, confession is useless, and the absolution received is invalid, so that the conscience remains burdened with sin as before, according to the present arrangements of divine Providence, because, as the Council of Trent says, true repentance requires not merely a detestation of one's sins, but also a firm purpose of amending one's life. Just as you would have little chance of regaining the favor of a prince whom you have grossly insulted, no matter how sorry you are for having done so, if you give him reason to believe that you are ready to repeat the offence, so, also, you cannot hope to be received into the friendship of the great God whom you have offended, and who considers not outward signs,

but the heart, unless you are seriously determined to avoid all mortal sin. There is no Catholic who doubts this truth, my dear brethren, for even little children learning their catechism know that a firm purpose of amendment is required, along with other things, for the valid reception of the sacrament of penance.

Many know in their hearts that they have not a firm purpose.

But, alas! if I ever had cause to fear that countless confessions are of no avail for the forgiveness of sins, I certainly have reason for that fear now, on account of the want of this sincere purpose. For, of the numbers who go to confession, how few there are who make an earnest attempt to amend their lives? How many there are who say, I am heartily sorry for my sins; how few who make a firm resolution to avoid sin in future! They all sing to the same tune; I firmly purpose to avoid all sin, and to amend my life, such are the words they utter with their mouths; but what do their hearts say? Ask your own conscience. Do you not often think, when saying those words, I shall never be able to do as I say; I cannot give up this or that? I will amend, says the mouth; but I cannot look favorably on that man whom I have borne hatred to for such a long time, and much less can I say anything good about him. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but when difficulties arise at home I will not abstain from cursing and swearing. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but next Sunday, as usual, I will go to the ale-house, and get drunk. So thinks the heart. I will amend, says the mouth; but if I happen to be in that person's company, which is very likely to be the case, I will not abstain from taking impure liberties. So thinks the heart. What kind of a firm determination of the will is that, when one knows in his conscience that he does not intend keeping his promise of amendment?

Others say they wish to amend.

I firmly purpose to amend my life. There are others who make use of those words before confession; but in the confessional itself they betray themselves and show by their own words that they are not in earnest. They say, for instance: I have a bad habit of cursing my husband, or wife, or children, or servants. Now speak the truth and tell me, is it really your intention to do your best to give up that hellish language, by which you scandalize your children, and teach them to imitate you, although you are bound before God to bring them up to virtue? You say: I have hitherto lived in disunion with my husband, or wife, or neighbor. Are you really determined in

future to preserve peace and harmony, and to live in conjugal and neighborly love and friendship, according to the law of Christ, and to bear patiently with the faults of others? You say: I have got drunk so often since my last confession, and when in that state I am quarrelsome, or cruel towards the members of my family, or I am likely to commit sins of impurity. Are you firmly resolved to abstain from drink in future, and to avoid those companions and houses that would be apt to lead you into sin? You say: I have often kept for myself a considerable quantity of material that was given me for a certain work. Are you honestly determined to give up that unjust practice? You accuse yourself of impure looks and desires, of unchaste words and songs, of actions and touches that one may not speak of. Are you firmly resolved never to be guilty of those sins again, nor to allow any one to take improper liberties with you?

But show that they do not mean it.

Answer my question, all of you. Have you that firm determination? Ah, yes, they say, sometimes with a deep sigh. And what are you sighing about? Ah, Father, it is so hard to avoid cursing; the children behave in such a way that one cannot avoid it. That is a fine purpose of amendment, indeed! How can you resolve to avoid during the remainder of your life that which you are firmly persuaded you cannot avoid? I must go to the ale-house on Sundays and holy-days; otherwise my comrades will laugh at me, and will have nothing to do with me if I act differently from them in this respect. I cannot live in peace with my husband or wife, or with that man; I was not the cause of the quarrel; it was he who first provoked me. Father, you do not understand how we have to manage in our trade; we must keep something now and then, over and above what is due to us; if not, we are hardly paid enough for our work, and we have wives and families to support. Father, what am I to do? If I give up this intimacy, or refuse to allow that person to commit those sinful actions with me, how am I to live? I cannot help myself; I have no pleasure in such things, but am driven to them by necessity. Fine penitents those are, indeed! And a fine purpose they have to amend their lives, and never to sin again! Of course, that purpose comes from their hearts! But how can that be, when, as you yourselves acknowledge, you are compelled to sin. Away with you! You have not a particle of resolution to avoid sin, and therefore you are not true penitents.

Others have only ineffi-

I purpose to amend my life. That is what others say. But they, too, are wanting in firmness of purpose; their desires to

amend are worthless and inefficacious, such as St. Augustine acknowledges that he himself had, before he became converted in earnest. There is many a one who feels the gnawing worm of conscience; the injustice or impurity in which he has been living for years begins to tire him; he knows that he is in a most dangerous state; the hell that he sees almost open before him fills him with anguish, and he readily acknowledges that he cannot long continue in the way of sin. Ah, he sighs, would that I were freed from this miserable state! Would that I had never seen or known that person! If I only could get rid of this wretched habit! And meanwhile he goes on as usual; he cannot make up his mind to overcome himself, or to use the proper means to amend his life. His purpose consists in mere desires, which are like the weather-cock on the steeple of a church, that turns round in every direction, according to the wind, but is not to be moved from its place, nevertheless. Such a sinner would like to amend, but he does not wish it in reality; he would like to avoid sin, but at the same time to gratify his wicked passions; he would like to love God above all things, with his whole heart, and at the same time to place no restraint on his love for creatures; he would like to enter on the way to heaven, and still to keep on the broad path that leads to hell; in a word, he would like to do penance, and amend his life, but he does not wish it earnestly, for he does not do it.

Vacious desires to avoid sin.

And what is the use of that? "The sluggard willeth and willeth not,"[1] says the Wise Man. It is not enough to say, I would like to do it; you must say, I will; I am in earnest about it, and I will make use of the proper means. There would be very little use in a merchant sitting down in his shop and saying, I would like to be rich; nor in the soldier saying, I would like to gain the victory; nor in the student saying, I would like to be at the head of the school, and to win the golden book at the end of the year. All this "would like" is not of the least help to them. They must set to work and labor, or fight, or study earnestly, if they wish to succeed. Hell is filled with such fruitless wishes and desires, which, if they were capable of restoring a sinner to the state of grace, would soon convert the abode of death into the mansion of life, and the prison of the damned into a paradise of joys. Sinner, are you in earnest about being converted and doing penance? Then you must say from your heart, with the penitent David; "I said: Now have

In reality they do not wish to avoid it.

[1] Vult et non vult piger.—Prov. xiii. 4.

I begun;"[1] I am fully determined to avoid all sin, and to amend my life. Now I have begun; the change for the better has already commenced. Ah, you think, if I only could do that! But you can do it. You should rather say, if I only wished to do it. You do not wish to do it, and it is there the fault lies. We read in the Gospel of St. Luke that the guests who were invited to the feast began to make excuse: "And they began all at once to make excuse." The first said, "I have bought a farm, and must needs go out and see it. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to try them;" but the third made it appear an utter impossibility for him to go: "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come."[2] But St. Matthew, who relates the same parable in a different manner, gives in a few words the true cause of their remaining away, and shows that their excuses were worthless: "They would not come,"[3] he says. He thus gives us to understand that the excuses we allege for not amending our lives, and which are founded on our weakness, or evil inclinations, or on temptations, habits, and necessity, are referred by the all-seeing God to the one chief cause, "they would not come;" they do not amend, because they do not wish to amend; they do not abstain from cursing, drunkenness, hatred, injustice, and impurity, because they do not wish to abstain. In a word, the earnest purpose is wanting to them.

They could amend if they really wished. Shown by an example.

And, in God's name, what is there to prevent you from amending, if you wish to do so? Has it become impossible for you to keep the commandments? Ah, what can we not do to secure some temporal gain, because we are in earnest about it! How readily we overcome ourselves, and what difficulties we are ready to face! In former times, when the celebrated town of Ostende was being besieged, there was a soldier who had grown so habituated to cursing and blaspheming that, although he was often warned, he used to say openly that he could not give up the habit. He had consumed all his provisions, and was forced to ask alms from the military chaplain; "yes," said the priest, "I will give you a gold piece, if you follow me for an hour wherever I go, and do not utter a curse during the whole time." The soldier agreed, and the priest went on purpose right through the camp, holding

[1] Dixi: nunc cœpi.—Ps. lxxvi. 11.

[2] Et cœperunt simul omnes excusare: villam emi, et necesse habeo exire et videre illam; juga boum emi quinque, et eo probare illa; uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.—Luke xiv. 18, 19, 20.

[3] Nolebant venire.—Matt. xxii. 3.

the piece of money in his hand. He visited one tent after another, wherever he found most of the soldiers assembled, and when they saw their comrade following him, they commenced to jeer at him as a fool. The soldier was boiling over with rage, and was frequently on the point of breaking out into some of his favorite curses; but (who would believe it?) he restrained himself perfectly, and not only held his tongue, but kept biting his lips, lest he should forget himself. When the hour was up, and the soldier had stood the laughter of his comrades without breaking his promise, the priest gave him the piece of money, with these few earnest words of warning: "you see now, my good friend, that you might have corrected your bad habit, if you wished; and what you have done for the sake of a piece of money, in spite of the great provocation you were exposed to, can you not do it for the sake of God and heaven, since, generally speaking, there is nothing to provoke you to curse or blaspheme?" O my dear brethren, how many sinners there are who think and say, I cannot amend; I cannot avoid this and that! I wish I could make use of a similar means to show them that they can amend. If they would only, for instance, give a penny to some poor person whenever they curse or swear, or send some money to a charitable institution when they fall into their accustomed sins, I am sure that in a short time they would find a great change for the better; and they would have to acknowledge that they were unable to amend hitherto because they had no wish to amend, and that, as they were wanting in this firm purpose, their confessions were invalid.

Others show by their acts that they have not a firm purpose.

Finally, there are others who say before confession, I am firmly resolved to amend my life; and they flatter themselves that they have a firm purpose, while they show in reality that there is nothing farther from their minds. For, if I ask one of those penitents, why have you been always running from one confessor to another? Why have you been looking out for a priest who never gives you a word of advice; who knows not the state of your conscience; who is ignorant of the length of time you have been subject to this bad habit, and who, not being aware that you are in the proximate occasion of sin, cannot remind you of your duty in that respect? What is the meaning of that, unless that you have not a firm purpose of amendment, and that you are not prepared to do all that God requires of you? Again; the same grievous sins of which you now accuse yourself, you have often confessed before; and you have been confess-

ing them for the last six, seven, or eight months, or even for the last two or three years, or longer; and after all that time you are just as much addicted to vice as before: how is it possible, how can any sensible man imagine that you ever had a sincere purpose of amendment, since there was not the least sign of any improvement in you? If a man is really resolved to avoid a certain thing, he can easily find means to carry out his intention. If you are determined not to fall into the mud, you know how to avoid the stone over which you stumbled before: for, as the proverb says, even the stupid ass does not stumble twice over the same stone. If you pour some boiling water once or twice over a dog that you wish to drive out of your kitchen, you will find that he will not come back again. But you return for the third, sixth, or twentieth time, with the same sins on your conscience, after having fallen over the same stone, or being scalded with the same water. Who can believe that you were in earnest about amending your life? Your purpose was evidently nothing more than empty words, to which you did not attach the least meaning. You have kept on saying, to-morrow, to-morrow; and thus you have put off the almighty God from one day to another, making, as it were, a fool of Him: "he is a scoffer," says St. Augustine, "and not a penitent, who still does what he repents of."[1]

All these are only sham penitents. Shown by a simile.

St. John Chrysostom calls a confession of that kind a theatrical penance, *pœnitentia theatralis*, such as would be represented on the stage, in a comedy. This is a simile, my dear brethren, which will serve admirably to explain the matter. Sometimes a fight is represented on the stage, in which the combatants rush at each other with drawn swords and with every appearance of rage and fury; at last one of them falls to the ground, stretches out his hands, and seems quite lifeless. A child, who does not understand what is going on, might begin to cry at seeing the man fall dead; but his father, who is sitting beside him, could easily reassure him, and explain to him that it was only a sham fight, and that the man would soon come to life again. Later on, the same man who pretended to be dead comes on the stage again in a different character; see, the father says to his child, there is the man; do you not recognize him? When it is all over, the pretended dead man goes home and eats, and drinks, and amuses himself with his family just as before. It is nearly the same with the apparent repentance of

[1] Irrisor est, non pœnitens, qui adhuc agit quod pœnitet.

many who go to confession; they throw themselves down on their knees, praying, sighing, and striking their breasts, and saying to themselves, I am heartily sorry for having offended God, and I will never sin again; so much they say with their lips, and then they go to the priest and receive absolution. Those who cannot see the heart would say in such circumstances that, surely, now there is an end of sin; those people have given every sign of true sorrow; but the angels would think differently and would see that the consciences of those people are still burdened with sin as before. How are you to know that? Have a little patience, and in a short time you will see the apparent penitent returning to his former evil ways; a sure sign that he has not had an earnest purpose of amendment; for, as Tertullian says, "where there is no amendment, there has been only a useless repentance."[1]

Because they do not avoid the sins they have confessed.

I do not mean to say, my dear brethren, that it is always an infallible sign of an inefficacious purpose for one to relapse into the same sins, especially when they are venial sins (for this sermon is not directed against them, and when they are declared in confession it is enough if one intends at least to lessen their number), nor even when they are mortal sins; that is to say, if the former sins are committed again, after some time or under the pressure of a great temptation or occasion. For our wills are, alas, inconstant and changeable, so that to-day we may be honestly determined to do the will of God, and to-morrow quite differently disposed. What I say holds good chiefly of those who spend months and years in the same vices, from one confession to another, without showing any sign of amendment, and without using the proper means to correct their bad habits. Of such people I say that they have not a firm purpose of amendment, in spite of their protestations to the contrary in confession, for their actions contradict their words. Hence there must be an earnest determination to avoid all sin. That is the first point. But the purpose must also be directed against all sin whatever, and for all time. This is the second point, and briefly the

Second Part.

There must be an earnest purpose to

The Roman Emperor and other Christian potentates never make a long peace with the Turks, who are sworn enemies of the Christians, but only declare a truce for a time; and when

[1] Ubi emendatio nulla, pœnitentia vana.

avoid sin completely and forever.

that time is expired they can go to war again, without any breach of faith. Sinners, God does not allow you to act thus with Him; He accepts no armistice for a given time; if you wish to be reconciled to Him, you must declare a perpetual peace with Him, which is to last forever. By virtue of your good resolution, your will must be at the present moment never to commit a single mortal sin, under any circumstances whatever, during your whole life, even if you were to live a hundred years, or could thereby gain all the riches and pleasures of earth, or would be otherwise reduced to the direst poverty, put to shame before the world, make all men your enemies, or have to suffer a disgraceful death. At the present moment, I say; for the purpose, no matter how strong it is, cannot keep you from sinning in the future, or prevent you from committing sin again (very many who have had the firm purpose of never offending God again have nevertheless fallen into grievous sin afterwards); but your will must be so disposed that you are firmly determined as long as your good purpose lasts, so that, while it does last, mortal sin is incompatible with it, and if it lasted for eternity, it would be impossible for you ever to commit a mortal sin. Again, God wishes to make a lasting peace with you; He will not be satisfied with half of your heart. That is, in virtue of this purpose you must be firmly resolved to avoid all the proximate occasions of sin, to overcome all bad desires and inclinations, and to fulfil all the obligations that arise out of sin. If you have not a firm resolution to that effect, your purpose is of no use in obtaining forgiveness of your sins, and your confession is invalid.

They err in this point who are not resolved to avoid sin in all circumstances.

How shamefully many are wanting in those two requisites to a firm purpose of amendment! Some make up their minds to avoid sin, but not always, nor under all circumstances. I will not curse or swear, they say, provided things go right with me. I will live in Christian peace and harmony with all men, but I will not bear anything from that particular person. I will forgive my enemy from my heart, until I have a good opportunity of revenging myself. I will lead a chaste life, if that person does not provoke me to sin. I will give up all indecent familiarities, as long as that individual keeps out of my way. I will avoid all dissipation during Lent; but when Easter comes I may launch out a little again. I will avoid all company in which I know by experience that my heart or my eyes are sullied; but next Shrove-tide I must except from my resolution,

because I shall be expected to join in the merry-making usual at the season according to the custom of the world. Ah, poor souls! your purposes are worth nothing; you do not make the proper peace with God! What He requires from you is a lasting peace, without condition or exception of time, circumstance, or temptation; a peace you must be firmly resolved to keep, no matter what happens.

Who voluntarily retain their bad desires and inclinations.

There are others who wish to avoid sin, but not completely; and they are, firstly, those who, although they avoid sinful acts, yet retain their evil desires and inclinations. They seem to me to act like a sick man, who abstains from certain articles of food and drink, solely because he is obliged to do so and must follow the doctor's prescription; and meanwhile his desires and his appetite tend towards the forbidden meats; he loves to talk of them, and his teeth water if he sees another enjoying them. Ah, he thinks, I wish I, could eat them, too! So it is, too, with the purpose of amendment that many sinners make. God has forbidden impure pleasures and revenge under pain of eternal damnation, and they know that; they think the fire of hell a severe punishment for such sins; the thought of it frightens them, and they abstain from sinful actions, although the desire to commit them is just as strong as before. They rejoice secretly when they think of the forbidden pleasures they have already enjoyed; they wish they had made more use of the opportunities formerly offered them of indulging their passions; they look on those as happy who still gratify themselves in that way; they wish that it were not forbidden, but lawful, to indulge in such pleasures; and they are so disposed, that, if there were no hell, they would sin without scruple. Thus they have no fear of sin, or of offending God, but solely of the fire of hell; and therefore they abstain under compulsion from that which they would otherwise willingly do. This is a mere slavish fear, which, according to the opinion of theologians, does not exclude fully the will to commit sin, and therefore is not sufficient for the true conversion and repentance of the sinner. Nay, to be thus disposed and to say, for instance, if impurity were not forbidden under pain of hell, I would commit it, is a new mortal sin; because it is a purpose of offending God if there were no hell, as well as a real complacency in and desire for the sinful action. But how injuriously you, who are thus minded, act towards God! You give Him your heart as you would give your money to a cut-throat who threatens your life; here, you say, take all my money, but

spare my life; while you think in your heart that, if he had not a dagger pointed at your throat, you would be very far from parting with your purse so easily. In the same way, I say, you act towards your God. Here, O my God, you say to Him, by your actions at least, here Thou hast my will and the assurance of my obedience; I must obey Thee and abandon sin; but if I had not hell to fear, if I could live forever, then I know what I should do. For shame, I say, to act thus meanly with your God! Away with your purpose; it is of no avail to the forgiveness of sin!

Who do not avoid the proximate occasion, give scandal, retain hatred, and do not make restitution.

Finally, they do not completely abandon sin who do not give up the nearest relations and comrades of sin; I mean, those who retain ill-gotten gains without making restitution to the lawful owner; who continue in improper intimacy and in the proximate occasion of sin, and who do not remove out of the way that which has been a scandal and a frequent cause of sin to themselves and others. There are some men who seem never to be satisfied with the sins they commit themselves in the present life, but leave, so to speak, an inheritance of sin to their descendants. Æneas Sylvius writes of the celebrated hero, John Zisca, that, as he was always accustomed to live and to fight amongst soldiers, he wished to be with them after his death; and to this end he expressed a wish, when he was dying, that his skin should be made into a drum after his death, that, as he could not be there in person to encourage the soldiers, they might have at least as much as possible of him. Such is the way, it seems to me, in which many sinners act. For instance, an unchaste man, who cannot any longer gratify his passions, dies; but he leaves behind him bad books, pictures, and statues enough to corrupt the living. A vindictive man dies; but he leaves behind him a legacy of hatred stamped in the memories of his children, by his oft repeated expressions of rancor against his enemy. An avaricious man dies; but he leaves his heirs a load of unjust and usurious gains that is sufficient to damn them. Oh, my dear brethren, all these people make bad confessions; their sorrow is useless, their purpose vain, the absolution they receive invalid; nor has any one who understands the matter the least doubt of that. The proximate occasion and danger of sin must be removed, and all obligations arising from sin must be fulfilled, or else one cannot say that he has abandoned sin completely. King Jehu, in order to fulfil the divine command, and to destroy utterly the house of Achab, wrote

to the chief men of Samaria, where the seventy sons of Achab were, "if you be mine and will obey me, take the heads of the sons of your master, and come to me to Jezrahel by to-morrow this time,"[1] that I may be sure you have slain them all, as the Lord has commanded me. Oh, how many confessors there are who, if they wished to do their duty properly, would have to make the same request of their penitents; when the latter say to them, I will avoid sin in future; I will keep out of the occasion; I will restore my ill-gotten gains; I will forgive my enemy, etc.! How many there are, I repeat, to whom the confessor should say: see, my child, that I may be certain that your purpose is sincere, as you have so often relapsed into the same sins, bring me the heads of your sins; do away with the dangerous occasion; give back what does not belong to you; be reconciled to him with whom you have been living in enmity; give up those abuses which have been the cause of sin to others; burn those immodest pictures; and when you have done that, "come to me to-morrow," and then I will give you absolution, for I shall then be certain that your purpose is sincere.

When this is honestly done, it is a sign of a firm purpose.

And on the other hand, what a blessing it would be, what a consolation for the confessor, what a splendid proof of an earnest purpose of amendment, if the penitent could say with truth, Father, I am seriously resolved to amend, and, in order to prove my sincerity, here are the heads of my sins; I have wronged my neighbor, but I have made complete restitution; or, I have the money here that belongs to him; can you not tell me how to restore it without exposing my good name? I have lived in improper intimacy for so long with a certain person; but that person is now gone away, or, I have left the house in which I used to sin. For some months past I have not spoken a word to one whom I disliked, but we are now reconciled, etc. Oh, I repeat, what a splendid proof of a sincere resolution to amend! But, alas, that proof is not always at hand! What a terrible day it will be when the "Written Book shall be produced;" when that great account-book shall be opened, out of which the thoughts, words, and actions of all men shall be judged. How many confessions and absolutions we shall then find rejected by the Judge, although, in the opinion of men, they were valid! Then we shall see the truth of the words, "Many are called, but few chosen,"[2] even, perhaps, amongst sinners who belong to

[1] Si mei estis, et obeditis mihi, tollite capita filiorum domini vestri, et venite ad me hac eadem hora cras in Jezrahel.—IV. Kings x. 6.

[2] Multi sunt vocati, pauci vero electi.—Matt. xx. 16.

the Catholic Church. But why? They generally go to confession. Few of them die without confessing and receiving the last sacraments. True; but God alone knows what sort of confessions they make. They confess their sins, but, as frequently happens, not properly, and that through want of true sorrow and a sincere purpose of amendment.

Conclusion of exhortation to avoid all sin.

"Pour out thy heart like water before the face of the Lord,"[1] is again my conclusion. O sinner, if you wish to be truly converted to God, follow this advice; pour out your heart like water, not like oil, so that no grievous sin may remain in it. And I add, pour out your heart like water, not as one empties a purse of money. And why not? If you let your purse fall, you stoop down to pick it up; but if you pour out water on the ground, it is soaked up, and you cannot put it back, nor, in fact, do you care much about it. In the same way should you make your purpose of amendment; pour all your sins out of your heart like water, that is, without will, desire, or hope to return to them again for all eternity, and with such a firm determination, that you may say, like St. Paul, "For I am sure that neither death nor life . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Our Lord:"[2] this I am assured of by the grace of God. Amen.

TWENTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON THE NECESSITY OF REMOVING THE PROXIMATE OCCASION OF SIN.

Subject.

He who does not remove the proximate occasion of sin and avoid it altogether cannot be freed from the state of sin and from eternal ruin.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Domine, salva nos; perimus.—Matt. viii. 25.
"Lord, save us; we perish."

[1] Effunde sicut aquam cor tuum ante conspectum Domini.—Lament. ii. 19.

[2] Certus sum enim quia neque mors, neque vita . . . neque creatura alia poterit nos separare a charitate Dei, quæ est in Christo Jesu Domino nostro.—Rom. viii. 38, 39.

Introduction.

That was a prayer that the disciples of Christ could offer with the greatest confidence of being heard and saved, although they were in imminent danger: "Lord, save us; we perish." Why? Because they had followed their divine Master into the ship and had Him with them as their Protector. If they had noticed beforehand the stormy state of the sea, and had nevertheless obstinately determined to trust themselves to it, without the protecting presence of the Lord, what would they have had to expect, if not shipwreck? In the same way, my dear brethren, they who, without absolute necessity, venture into all sorts of dangerous occasions and company, desire, hope for, and expect in vain the help of God, and, as I showed in the last sermon, cannot long keep free from mortal sin, on account of their weakness and the want of a special grace of God. Further, if that holds good of those companions who are only a remote occasion of sin, and from whom one often comes away unhurt, and of these we have been speaking hitherto, what are we to think of those companions and people who are a proximate occasion of sin to us? Certainly, they must be at once avoided, and that for all time, or else there is no hope of being saved from mortal sin and from eternal ruin, as I shall prove to-day.

Plan of Discourse.

He who does not avoid those companions who are a proximate occasion of sin to him, and avoid them for all time, cannot be freed from the state of sin and from eternal ruin. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon.

"Lord, save us; we perish." Help, O Lord, by Thy powerful grace, all those who are in the proximate occasion, that they may at once avoid it, so as to escape eternal destruction. "Lord, save us; we perish." Help, O Lord, all others, that we may carefully avoid every occasion that seems to be even in a remote degree dangerous, so that such occasions may not be afterwards turned into proximate ones for us. This we ask of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

In what the proximate occasion of sin consists.

That we may not be groping in the dark, we must first try to find out what is the proximate occasion of sin. It is nothing else but a danger into which, if one runs, or remains, he, generally speaking, falls into sin, whether in thought or desire, or in words and conversation, or in deeds and actions. Here each

one must consider his own nature and weakness, his desires and inclinations, and his past experience: for the same circumstance may be the proximate occasion of sin to one, and not to another. For instance, I know by experience that, whenever I go to a certain house, I sin against holy purity: or else that, out of ten times, for example, that I have been there, I have sinned seven or eight times. That house, as long as the same people live in it, is the proximate occasion of sin to me. In the same way you are in the habit of consenting to an unchaste desire when you look at a certain person of the opposite sex, or at a picture that is not sufficiently decent: a deliberate look at that person or that picture is the proximate occasion and danger of sin for you. Another, when in company with certain friends of his, is wont to indulge in impure discourse and to take a sinful pleasure in it: those companions are for him the proximate occasion of sin. Another is living in a house, or at an inn, where he constantly sees a person for whom he has an impure attachment, so that he, generally speaking, whenever he sees that person consents to unlawful desires and thoughts, or actually commits some sinful action: to remain in that house is for him the proximate occasion of sin. Another knows from experience that, when he takes too much to drink, although not to perfect ebriety, he is wont to commit sins of impurity, or to be quarrelsome; that drink is to him the proximate occasion of sin. A young person of the opposite sex knows by experience that, if she spends her time in the evenings standing at the door (O that would that the wretched practice were done away with, for it can certainly do no good!) she is likely to meet with some companions of the neighborhood, who will lead her into sin: that habit is for her the proximate occasion of sin. And so on for other circumstances.

It is a sin not to shun it.

Now, I repeat, he who is not firmly resolved to shun such an occasion once for all, or, if he is actually in it, to give it up completely, cannot be saved from eternal ruin, no matter how often he goes to confession or holy Communion: he is and remains in the state of sin. Why so? Because, even if his going into such an occasion, or his remaining in it, should not be the cause of sin to him now and then, yet it is in itself a sin which God has forbidden under pain of eternal damnation. For He who forbids the end forbids also the means that must of necessity lead to that end; and He who forbids me to commit sin forbids me also to have anything to do with that which, humanly spe

ing, necessarily brings sin along with it, and that is the case with the proximate occasion.

It was forbidden by God even in paradise.

So we see God has done in all his commandments. In the very beginning He forbade our forefather Adam to eat of the fruit of the tree that was in the middle of paradise: "Of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat. For in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death."[1] Did he, then, forbid the eating alone of the fruit? So it would appear if we consider the words of the commandment; but hear the answer that Eve gave to the serpent afterwards, when he asked her why she did not enjoy such beautiful fruit. "Of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of paradise, God hath commanded us that we should not eat; and that we should not touch it, lest perhaps we die."[2] Mark those words, we must not even stretch forth our hands to touch the fruit; for its very touch, the sight of its pleasing colors, and its agreeable smell would so entice us, that we could not refrain from eating it; such was Eve's line of argument, and she concluded, therefore God has forbidden us not merely to eat of the fruit, but even to touch it. O Eve, would that thou hadst followed thy own sound judgment, and kept away thy curious eyes and hands from the fruit; for then thou and Adam would not have eaten it, and plunged thyself and thy unhappy descendants into such misery!

In the Old and the New Law.

In the Old Testament God acted in the same way with the Israelites. He had forbidden them to adore false gods, and in order to remove every dangerous occasion out of their way, He commanded them at the same time to burn all their graven images: "Their graven things thou shalt burn with fire."[3] They were not to keep any of these things in their houses, nor even to desire the silver and gold of which they were made: "Thou shalt not covet the silver and gold of which they are made, neither shalt thou take to thee anything thereof, lest thou offend . . . neither shalt thou bring anything of the idol into thy house, lest thou become an anathema, like it."[4] He had commanded them not to eat leavened bread on Easter, and therefore they were obliged to throw away all such bread out of their houses during those

[1] De ligno autem scientiæ boni et mali ne comedas. In quocumque enim die comederis ex eo, morte morieris.—Gen. ii. 17.

[2] De fructu ligni quod est in medio paradisi, præcepit nobis Deus, ne comederemus, et ne tangeremus illud, ne forte moriamur.—Ibid. iii. 3.

[3] Sculptilia eorum igne combures.—Deut. vii. 25.

[4] Non concupisces argentum et aurum, de quibus facta sunt, neque assumas ex eis tibi quidquam, ne offendas: nec inferes quidquam ex idolo in domum tuam, ne fias anathema, sicut et illud est.—Ibid. 25, 26.

days. The Nazarenes were not allowed to drink wine and had consequently to abstain from eating fresh or dried grapes, lest the taste of the fruit should entice them to taste the wine also. With still greater care, says St. John Chrysostom, did Our Lord, in the law of grace, endeavor to cut off the occasions that might lead us to transgress His commands. He tells us in the Gospel of St. Matthew that, "Whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment. . . and whosoever shall say: Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."[1] But why so severe, O Lord? That no occasion may be given of doing anything against the principal commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." For if it were lawful to vent one's anger against another, to abuse and vilify him, there would be the greatest danger of coming to blows and even murder in the end. The only confirmation of your speech shall be, yes or no; never shall you swear unless compelled thereto by absolute necessity. Why? That we may have no occasion to violate that other chief commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness."

Especially as regards impurity.

But with regard to the commandment forbidding adultery and other sins of impurity, to which our miserable nature is so inclined, oh, how careful Christ was! He has closed our eyes, ears, mouths, hearts, and minds against this vice, and forbidden us, under pain of sin, to look at, listen to, speak or think of, voluntarily, anything impure, to look at a person of the opposite sex with desire, or even to mention the vice: "All uncleanness, let it not so much as be named among you,"[2] as St. Paul says. He has forbidden us, under pain of sin, to hang up anything on the walls of our rooms, or to allow anything to appear in our dress or outward behavior, which might be suggestive of impure ideas. He has commanded us, under pain of sin, to give up the friendship and society of those who are apt to lead us into this vice, no matter how dear they are to us, or how useful or necessary we find them; for such is the meaning of those well-known words in the Gospel: "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee:"[3] that is, if a person who is dear to you as the apple of your eye is the occasion of sin to you, away with him at once. "And if thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee:"[4] that is, if you gain more by visiting

[1] Omnis qui irascitur fratri suo, reus erit judicio; qui autem dixerit fatue, reus erit gehennæ ignis.—Matt. v. 22.

[2] Omnis immunditia nec nominetur in vobis.—Ephes. v. 3.

[3] Si oculus tuus scandalizat te, erue eum, et projice abs te.—Matt. xviii. 9.

[4] Si autem manus tua, vel pes tuus scandalizat te, abscide eum et projice abs te.—Ibid. 8.

that house than you could by the work of your hands, and if that house is the occasion of sin to you, you must avoid it altogether. If the society of that person is necessary to your comfort and well-being, so that you could do without it as little as without your foot, but it is an occasion of sin to you, you must leave that person once for all.

And the divine command on this point is very strict.

Mark, my dear brethren, how exact the command is. Christ does not say, "if thy eye scandalize thee, close it, so as not to see anything with it," but "pluck it out." He does not say, "if thy hand or foot scandalize thee, tie it up," so that it cannot move; but, "cut it off." Hence it is not enough for the fulfilment of this law for one to say, I will go that house, or into that company, or to see that person; but I will guard my heart and my senses so as not to fall into sin. No; that is not the way to pluck out the eye, or to cut off the hand or foot. The occasion has to be completely avoided. Nay, Our Lord is not even satisfied with this; He says, moreover, that we must throw away the eye, hand, or foot, without any desire to take it back again. Why so, dearest Saviour? If I pluck out my eye, can I not keep it by me, since there is no further danger of my seeing anything with it? If I cut off my hand or foot, can I not preserve it in my room, since it will not help me any more to feel or to walk? And therefore I will obey Thy command, and not keep the person who has been the occasion of sin to me in my house, but she can live in the neighborhood; I will break off all intimacy with her, but I will continue to salute her now and then; I will not speak with her alone, but I will write to her occasionally to show that I bear her no hatred. No; even that much is dangerous and would make matters just as bad as before; for it would at least be the occasion of unlawful thoughts and desires. Pluck out the eye, and cast it from thee. You must be as much separated from that person as if you did not know her at all, so that you will have neither the wish nor the power of renewing your intimacy with her. That Christ forbids this under pain of grievous sin is evident from the words that follow: "It is better for thee having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."[1] Hence he who keeps the eye, hand, or foot, that is, who does not remove the occasion of sin altogether, will be cast into hell, so that it is a grievous sin, deserving of eternal damnation, not to leave the occasion of sin, or to go into it voluntarily.

[1] Bonum tibi est cum uno oculo in vitam intrare, quam duos oculos habentem mitti in gehennam ignis.—Matt. xviii. 9.

So that he who does not shun the proximate occasion is not worthy of absolution.

Such is the general teaching of theologians, who are agreed in saying that a man must sacrifice even a great pleasure, or honor, or wealth, rather than enter a house, go into company, or associate with a person who places him in the proximate danger of sin. Nay, there are many who maintain that, if necessary, one should sacrifice in such circumstances all one's wealth, honor, and good name, and even life itself, because we must be always prepared to renounce everything, rather than offend God by grievous sin. There were, indeed, some who taught that one is not bound to shun the proximate occasion of sin if there is a good or reasonable cause for remaining in it; and, again, that it is lawful to seek an occasion of the kind, if one can gain some great advantage by it for himself or for his neighbor; further, that one is not obliged to turn out of his house the person with whom he has been in the habit of sinning, if the absence of that person would cause him too much grief or sickness, and it would be difficult to find any one to replace her. But all these propositions are condemned by the Popes Innocent XI. and Alexander VII. Hence he who remains in the proximate occasion of sin and is not disposed to remove or abandon it at once is not worthy of absolution, no matter what other promises or excuses he makes.

Although he gives other signs of repentance on his death-bed.

One can hardly say of a dying Catholic that he is damned; but one of the surest arguments that lead one to such a conclusion is to see him die without having cut off the occasion of sin. There is a question amongst the learned as to whether King Solomon did penance for his sins and has saved his soul, or not. Many agree with some of the holy Fathers in thinking that he is saved; and they base their opinion on the words he wrote in his old age, "Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity," and on several expressions of a similar nature, which could come only from a contrite heart. Others, on the contrary, maintain that he is damned, and their sole argument for saying so is the fact that he did not destroy the temples that he had built in honor of the idols of his concubines. St. Eucherius agrees with this; "it is evident," he says, "that Solomon did not do penance fully for the crime of idolatry; for if he had brought forth fruit worthy of penance, he certainly would have endeavored above all to destroy the idolatrous temples which he had built:" [1] This conclusion, says a learned author, seems to me irresistible. However, there are some holy Fathers who dispute the argument and

[1] Palam ostenditur quod Solomon de admissæ idololatriæ scelere numquam perfecte pœnituit; nam si fructus pœnitentiæ dignos faceret, satageret ante omnia, ut idola, quæ ædificaverat, tollerentur.—St. Eucherius in IV. Kings xxiii.

say that Solomon either really destroyed the temples, or that circumstances prevented him from destroying them all before his death. However that be, I will neither condemn nor canonize him; I hope with all my heart that he is saved. But this much I say with that author, if you see a dying man kissing the crucifix, uttering pious words, and leaving something considerable to the poor and sick in his will, you can probably conclude that he has died a happy death; but if, when he could do so, he has not destroyed what he had built up for the devil and the flesh, if you still see in his house or in his room the person whom he kept to gratify his passions, you can with still greater probability conclude that the unfortunate man is damned. For he has not removed the proximate occasion of sin, and therefore he has not, as he could and should have done, freed himself from the state of sin.

Hence one should prefer poverty or any discomfort, rather than remain in the occasion of sin.

From this it follows, in the first place, that he whose occupation or business is a proximate occasion of sin to him, which he, after having used the means suggested to him for that purpose by his confessor, cannot convert into a remote occasion, is bound in conscience without the least delay to leave that occupation or business, even if he should thereby be reduced to poverty. According to this a servant is bound to leave his employment before his time is expired, even at the risk of losing his salary, if he has kept up an impure intimacy in the house, which he cannot otherwise abandon. A maidservant is bound to leave her situation before the expiration of her time of service, and to seek a living elsewhere, if she is solicited to unlawful actions by her master, or his son, or his servant, or by strangers who come to the house, and is in the habit of consenting to their wishes. Even the son or daughter of the family, though reduced to beggary by so doing, is bound to leave the house, if by remaining they are in the proximate occasion of sin, which they cannot avoid; but that is rarely the case, since it is easy for them to avoid sin with the help of their parents.

It is a vain excuse to say that one does not intend to sin in the occasion.

Secondly, it follows that the excuses that are often alleged are worthless. People say, I cannot yet leave that house, that person, that company; I will go on as usual, but, with the help of God, I will avoid sin. No matter whether you commit sin or not, you are still guilty in the sight of God, inasmuch as He has forbidden, not only the sinful act, but also the occasion of it. And what is the good of saying, I will go into the occasion, but by the help of divine grace will not commit sin any more?

You might as well say, I will go out at night and leave my door open, trusting to Providence that no thieves will enter my house; I will put my head into the jaws of a raging lion, trusting that God will prevent him from hurting me; I will not give up drinking, but I hope that God will not allow me to get drunk; I will run into the midst of bullets and swords, but, with the help of God, will not get wounded; I will stand in the middle of a fire, but I hope that God will prevent me from being burnt. What foolish talk that is! How many youths were there who came uninjured out of the furnaces of Babylon? The holy Scripture mentions only three; but now it seems that I must believe that you will be the fourth; for, as St. John Chrysostom says, it is as great a miracle for one not to fall into sin, especially in the matter of impurity, when he goes into the occasion of it, as for the three Hebrew youths to have come out of the fire unharmed. Do you think that God will work a miracle to please you, if you wantonly rush into the danger? I take to witness your own experience. How often have you not made the same promise, and sworn almost in the confessional that you would be careful, with the grace of God, not to fall into sin? And up to the present that promise has remained unfulfilled. For does not your own conscience tell you that, whenever you went to that person, that company, or that house, you came away with another sin on your soul? In vain, therefore, do you renew those promises; you commit a sin by the very presumption of which you are guilty in remaining in, or seeking wilfully, such a danger.

It is vain to rely on the confession one makes and the absolution received.

It follows, thirdly, how little reason one has to depend on one's ordinary confessions and the absolutions he receives, as long as he continues in the occasion of sin. There are many who say, it is true that I commit sin generally when I go to that house, or into that company, or see that person, but I go to confession immediately after, and receive absolution; the priest says nothing to me about the matter, and I must give him credit for knowing his business, etc. So much the worse. A fine confession, that, says St. Ambrose, and a wonderful absolution! Those people are like one who tries to wash himself with an unburnt brick; the more he wets it, and rubs himself with it, the dirtier he becomes.[1] What better are you for going often to confession, if you continue in the proximate occasion of sin? Instead of cleansing your soul, you only add a new burden to it, in the shape of a sacrilegious confession and Communion; for without

[1] Quo magis lavabat, eo magis luto linlebatur.

an earnest purpose to avoid the occasion of sin you can have neither true sorrow nor resolution of amendment. But, you say, I receive absolution each time. No, I answer, you do not; you hear the words of the form that the priest speaks, but that is all. For you do not act honestly with God and your soul; you run from one confessor to another, who does not know the state of your conscience, or you seek one who will not question you much, and to him you tell the sins you have committed since your last confession, but nothing more; you say nothing of the fact that you are in the habit of committing those sins for a long time because you are in the proximate occasion of them, and that you are bound to tell. Thus, in an underhand manner, you steal an absolution from a confessor who has no suspicion of how matters really stand with you; but it is an absolution that will do you no good, for it will be written down against you in the great account-book, and will only increase your torments in hell; and one day you will find out that your conversion was only a sham and came from a heart that was filled with falsehood. Such is the complaint that God makes of the daughter of Juda by the Prophet Jeremias: "And after all this her treacherous sister Juda hath not returned to me with her whole heart, but with falsehood, saith the Lord."[1]

For such an absolution is invalid.

Otherwise, according to the teaching of theologians, if the confessor knows that you are in the proximate occasion of sin, he cannot give you absolution, unless you are firmly resolved to avoid that occasion forever. Nay, if you have often promised him to avoid it, and have not fulfilled your promise, he dare not in the end absolve you from your sins, unless you have really left the house or the person who is the cause of sin to you; nor must he trust any farther to your mere promise, even if you confirm it with an oath. If, in spite of that, he gives you absolution, then either he does not know his duty, or else he commits a sin with you, by trying, as St. Cyprian says, to make a peace between you and God, "which is a vain and false peace, injurious to him who gives it, and in no way profitable to him who receives it."[2] It is a favor which condemns the judge, and does not acquit the accused. You must know that, although you may have received absolution a hundred times in that way, if you wish afterwards to do sincere penance and be really con-

[1] In omnibus his non est reversa ad me prevaricatrix soror ejus Juda in toto corde suo; sed in mendacio, ait Dominus.—Jerem. iii. 10.

[2] Irrita et falsa pax, periculosa dantibus, nihil accipientibus profutura. —St. Cyprian, tract. de lapsis.

verted to God, you must tell in confession all the mortal sins you committed during the whole time you were in the occasion of sin, as well as the number of times you made sacrilegious confessions and Communions, and all those confessions you must repeat with true sorrow, because the absolutions you received were null and void, as you had not true sorrow and purpose of amendment.

And confession is useless, too. Shown by a simile.

It is with your confessions as with king Saul when he had overthrown the Amalekites, as I have mentioned already. God had commanded him to destroy the Amalekites, and not to spare even a beast belonging to them; but he saved from destruction the king and the best of the flocks. Meanwhile the prophet Samuel arrived on the scene, and Saul went to meet him, boasting of what he had done, as if he had fulfilled to the letter the command of the Lord: "Blessed be thou of the Lord, I have fulfilled the word of the Lord."[1] What? said Samuel, you have fulfilled the word of the Lord? "What meaneth, then, this bleating of the flocks, which soundeth in my ears, and the lowing of the herds, which I hear?"[2] Is that the way you fulfil the command of God? Such is sometimes the way with you, too, O sinner, when you come out of the confessional. Thank God, you say to your friend, or think to yourself, I have got rid of that much, at all events; I have confessed my sins, and am reconciled to God; "I have fulfilled the word of the Lord." But your friend might ask you, if he entered your house, what is this that soundeth in my ears? If you are freed from your sins, how is it I still hear in the house the voice of the person who has been the cause of sin to you? Why do I still see those indecent pictures on your walls, and those impure love-tales on your table, which have been to you the occasion of unchaste thoughts and desires? Has not God commanded you to put away all those things? Is that the way in which you fulfil His command? Ah, you deceive yourself! Sin is still in your heart; you are not at all reconciled to God; the unclean spirit is still in peaceable possession of your soul. No; the proximate occasion must be removed, or all your confessions will be of no help to you.

The best sign of true sorrow is to remove the

But if you wish to be able to say with truth that you are reconciled to God, and are freed from the state of sin, then hear what happened to the Apostle St. Peter. He was lying in

[1] Benedictus tu Domino, implevi verbum Domini.—I. Kings xv. 13.

[2] Et quæ est hæc vox gregum, quæ resonat in auribus meis, et armentorum, quam ego audio?—Ibid. 14.

prison, bound with chains, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles: "And behold, an angel of the Lord stood by him, and a light shined in the room; and he, striking Peter on the side, raised him up, saying: Arise quickly . . . gird thyself, and put on thy sandals. . . Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me."[1] Peter went with him, and they passed the first and second ward till they came to the iron gate, which opened of itself to them; but still Peter did not know what was happening to him: "He knew not that it was true which was done;"[2] he thought it was all a dream; "he thought he saw a vision."[3] But when they had gone some distance through the streets, and Peter found himself really outside the gates, he began to realize what had occurred; oh, he said, with joy and wonder, "Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."[4] A striking picture this, my dear brethren, of the sinner who, living in the habit of sin for a long time, bound with ropes and fetters to some creature, and lying in a gloomy prison, at last becomes really converted to God. The light of divine grace shines on him, by which he is enabled to see the bondage in which he is held under the yoke of the devil. "Arise quickly," says the angel of the Lord to him, when he hears a sermon, or reads a spiritual book, or hears of some sudden death; cast off the fetters of impure passion; save yourself from the slavery of sin. He hears the voice and is at the same time tormented by his conscience; the iron gate, which was closed so long, opens at last; that is, he opens his mouth to declare his sins in confession. This is an excellent beginning he makes; but it cannot be trusted much yet. Like Peter, he may still have good reason for doubting if he is really freed from prison, or if it is only a dream, an imaginary penance that he has done: "he thought he saw a vision." But if he gets so far as to see the gate shut behind him, that is, if he has removed the proximate occasion of sin; if he has determined not to go near that house, that person, that company any more, and really keeps away from them altogether, for a month or two, so that he can say with truth that he is done with them, then, indeed, he can

occasion of sin. Shown by another simile.

[1] Et ecce, angelus Domini astitit, et lumen refulsit in habitaculo, percussoque latere Petri, excitavit eum dicens: Surge velociter.... Præcingere, et calcea te caligas tuas.... Circumda tibi vestimentum tuum et sequere me.—Acts xii. 7, 8.

[2] Nesciebat quia verum est quod fiebat. - Ibid. 9. [3] Existimabat se visum videre.—Ibid.

[4] Nunc scio vere quia misit Dominus angelum suum, et eripuit me de manu Herodis, et de omni expectatione plebis Judæorum.—Ibid. 11.

rejoice with Peter, and say: "Now I know in very deed that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of the hellish Herod." Blessed be God, I am at last freed from the state of sin! I can now be certain that my repentance was genuine; I am really reconciled to God; I am on the right way again; my only care now need be to keep on it and advance towards heaven. Oh, what an unusual consolation for such a man! A consolation which he has hitherto known nothing of, while in the state of slavery. How grateful the repose of conscience he enjoys! A repose of which he had no experience while his conscience was tormenting him, even in the midst of his forbidden pleasures.

Conclusion, exhortation, and purpose to shun the occasion at once.

I conclude, my dear brethren, with the words of Samuel to the Israelites, "If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, put away the strange gods from among you."[1] Do you wish, O sinners, to free yourselves from the state of sin, to be reconciled to God, and to enjoy the peace and repose of a good conscience? Then, you must "put away the strange gods from among you." Is there one among you who is in the habit of sin, especially of impurity, and who always comes to confession with the same story? Let him examine himself to see what is the cause of it, and he will perhaps find that it is some person for whom he has an impure attachment, or some house, or company in which he is accustomed to sin. Thus he will discover the stone against which he so often stumbles, the idol which he adores instead of the true God. Away, then, with that person; shun that house, that company; the occasion must be removed at once; there is no other means for you to regain the grace of God and to escape eternal damnation. Put away the strange gods from amongst you without delay, do not remain a moment longer in the occasion, for the longer you delay the more difficult will your conversion become. On this depends the fate of your soul and its eternal happiness or misery. Nothing in the world should be too difficult for one to undertake with readiness, in order to avoid an eternal hell, and to gain an eternal heaven. Put away the strange gods, then; remove the occasion at once, no matter what it costs you. But that intimacy has now lasted for such a long time, and it is a source of such pleasure. No matter; that is only another reason for breaking it off all the sooner. Away with it! It is better for you to go to heaven without your dear

[1] Si in toto corde vestro revertimini ad Dominum, auferte deos alienos de medio vestri.—I. Kings vii. 3.

friend, than to go to hell with him or her. But that person is very useful to me in my house-keeping, and is a source of great profit? No matter; if it were to reduce you to beggary, the person must go; it is better for you to go to heaven without sensual pleasures, than to go to hell to be tortured forever after the short-lived joys of this earth. I acknowledge, O Lord, the truth of all this, and therefore I willingly give up the occasion of sin, with the determination never to venture into it again! Thou wilt help me by Thy grace to overcome the difficulty I may at first experience in doing this. But no matter what happens, if it were a thousand times more difficult, it must be done at once. I cannot and will not burn in hell forever; I must go to Thee in heaven. Therefore farewell to all you who have hitherto been an occasion of sin to me; I know you no longer! My God alone will I serve, and Him will I love above all things, with my whole heart. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same sermon for the Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle.

Text.

Qui vexabantur a spiritibus immundis, curabantur.—Luke vi. 18.

"And they that were troubled with unclean spirits were cured."

O how good it would be, and how necessary for Our Lord, still to remain on earth, and to heal diseases! For what a number of people there are who suffer, not merely in their mortal bodies, but who are in a most desperate state as regards their souls; especially they who are plagued by the unclean spirit, that is by the demon of impurity. But after all, have we not Christ amongst us, and can we not go to Him every day, in order to be healed? Are not the confessionals, in which we can lay down the burden of our sins, always open? Does not Christ give to all who approach Him His own virginal Flesh and Blood in the holy Communion, in order to cleanse us from the filth of our sins? Truly, my dear brethren, if we only would approach Our Lord with contrite hearts and a firm purpose of amendment, our sickness would soon be healed. But, alas! How many there are, possessed by the unclean spirit, whom neither the sacrament of penance nor the holy Communion can help to recover their health; for they continue in the proximate occasion of committing sins against holy purity. Such people as these have no means of salvation left, unless, like the holy Apostle, St. Bar-

tholomew, they allow themselves to be flayed alive; that is, unless they renounce the occasion to which, generally speaking, they are more attached than the skin is to their body, as I shall now prove.

Plan of Discourse.

He who is possessed by the unclean spirit of impurity must remove the proximate occasion of sin and shun it altogether; or else he cannot be helped out of the state of sin. Such is the whole subject of to-day's sermon. What I now say of the vice of impurity in particular can and must be understood, due proportion being observed, of the proximate occasion of all other sins.

And that all here present may profit by it, let us make an earnest resolution to avoid even the least danger of sin, as far as possible. Give us Thy grace to this end, O Almighty God, through the intercession of Thy Immaculate Mother and of the holy and most pure angels.

TWENTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE VAIN EXCUSE OF THE SINNER WHO SAYS HE IS NOT IN THE PROXIMATE OCCASION.

Subject.

Many do not wish to remove or avoid the proximate occasion of sin, because they persuade themselves, either that it is not a proximate occasion for them, or that in future it will not be so dangerous for them.— *Preached on the fifth Sunday after Epiphany.*

Text.

Inimicus homo hoc fecit.—Matt. xiii. 28.
"An enemy hath done this."

Introduction.

"Man is a wolf to his fellow-man,"[1] says the old proverb. "A man's enemies shall be they of his own household,"[2] says Jesus Christ, the eternal Truth. This is especially the case in

[1] Homo homini lupus.

[2] Inimici hominis domestici ejus.—Matt. x. 36.

what concerns the salvation of our souls, wherein we often find those who are most dear to us to be our worst and most dangerous enemies, and who, the more we love them, are the more to be dreaded by us. I now allude specially to the society of those who are the proximate occasion of sin to us, principally in the matter of impurity. Oh, what a multitude of sins are caused by such an occasion. He who is once entangled in it has his soul sowed like a field with all sorts of weeds of carnal thoughts, desires, words, and works. If he asks, who has done that? his own conscience will answer him, "an enemy hath done this," it is the work of that person, that house, that company, that proximate occasion. Therefore he who wishes to keep his soul free from those weeds must at once remove and avoid forever the proximate occasion; otherwise there is no chance of saving him from eternal ruin, as I have shown in my last sermon. But, O blindness and stupidity of man! He who is once entangled in an occasion of the kind loves nothing more than the enemies of his soul; he tries to deceive himself in all sorts of ways; he has all sorts of false arguments to prove that the bad company he keeps, although it is in reality an occasion of sin to him, is not likely to do him harm. I cannot avoid that company, he says, or else, I am not bound in conscience to avoid it. So that, no matter how you exhort him, you can never persuade him to make up his mind to give it up. We shall now consider the excuses which some people bring forward in this matter.

Plan of Discourse.

Many think they are not bound to remove or to avoid the proximate occasion of sin, because they persuade themselves, either that it is not a proximate occasion for them, or that in future it will not be so dangerous for them. A vain and idle excuse. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

That those whom it concerns may understand it, and that we may all be on our guard against the enemy of our souls, that is, the occasion of sin, we beg of Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

First excuse: I do not go into the occasion for the purpose of sinning.

To come to the subject at once. Of the first class of those who try to persuade themselves that this or that occasion is not a proximate one of sin to them, or that it will not be so dangerous for them in future, there are some who say by way of excuse: I keep that person in my house, not for the purpose of committing sin and offending God, but because that person is useful or

necessary to me in the management of my domestic affairs. I go to that house, or into that company, not to commit sin, but to visit my friends, according to the requirements of courtesy, or to pass away the time in lawful amusements. In looking at or speaking to that person, who is pleasing to me, I seek nothing but a pleasure and delight such as one experiences in eating and drinking, in looking at a play, or in listening to good music. That is all I want. I do not seek carnal or forbidden pleasure, and if I feel it, it is against my will and intention, and I protest that I never will voluntarily seek such pleasure, for I do not wish to offend God by a mortal sin, etc.

It is a self-deceit.

But what a wretched excuse that is! I thought that the deceit that Satan practised in paradise, and that has since produced such lamentable fruit in the world, was detested by all, but now I am forced to believe the words of the philosopher Seneca: "In what do we rejoice more than in deceit?"[1] And, in fact, we even try to deceive ourselves, especially in things that concern our spiritual welfare; and the more crafty and cunning our deceit, the more we love it. But this is that deplorable blindness, that most terrible punishment, which God inflicts on our sins in this life. Nor do I ask you to believe this on my authority, but on that of the Apostle, St. Paul, who, writing to the Thessalonians, says: "Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, therefore God shall send them the operation of error to believe lying."[2]

For he offends God, after all.

What, in the name of wonder, is the meaning of your excuse, I will keep in my house or I will go to visit the person who pleases me, but not with the intention of committing sin and offending God? Where is the sinner in the world so wicked, what robber or murderer is so abandoned, as to sin only for the purpose of offending God? Ask them about it, one after the other, for instance, why did you steal? To get the money, the thief will answer, that I want for my support. Why did you kill that man? To have revenge on him. Why did you commit adultery? To satisfy my passion. None of them will acknowledge that his object was to offend God. To sin merely for the purpose of sinning, and through hatred of God, belongs rather to the demons in hell than to men who are still living on earth, and if one of the latter were found to be guilty of such malice

[1] Quo nisi mendacio gaudemus?

[2] Eo quod charitatem veritatis non receperunt, ut salvi fierent. ideo mittet illis Deu operationem erroris, ut credant mendacio.—II. Thess. ii. 10.

he should be looked on as an incarnate demon rather than as a reasoning human being. I have not the least difficulty, then, in believing that you, who are in the proximate occasion, do not keep in your house or visit that person for the purpose of offending God. You even wish that what you do were not forbidden by God, and therefore you seek after all sorts of subterfuges to excuse yourself from sin in what you do. Meanwhile, however, in your looks, desires, thoughts, words, and gestures, without saying anything of other actions, you do what God has forbidden under pain of eternal damnation, and what can not be done without sin, as, I suppose, your own experience has taught you before this, if you wish to be candid with yourself, and therefore it is in vain that you try to excuse yourself by appealing to your intention.

A ridiculous excuse. Shown by similes.

It would be a ridiculous thing for a man to sit down in a house which is on fire, and to say, I am sitting here, not that I may be burnt, but because I want to finish my business. This intention of his will not save him from the flames. You maintain, with a certain amount of hair-splitting casuistry, that you do not seek in the society of that person a carnal and forbidden pleasure, and that your only intention is to gratify your inclination and your outward senses. But supposing I were to set fire to your house, and that to your just complaints my only answer would be: Oh, I did not mean to do you any harm, nothing was farther from my intention; my only wish was to see the fire and to warm myself at it, what would you think of that? Yet it is worth as much as your lame excuse. You say you do not seek for carnal pleasure; but you voluntarily place a cause which is, of itself, apt to awaken carnal pleasure, and must, of necessity, give rise to it; now, he who wills the cause wills also the effect that comes from it. Therefore that occasion is a proximate one for you, and you are not allowed either to go into it, or to remain in it, and no matter what it costs you, it must be removed.

Second excuse: I have resolved after confession not to sin in the occasion any more.

I acknowledge, another, apparently more reasonable than the first, says, that that house, person, or company has hitherto been a proximate occasion of sin for me; but I have never had such a clear knowledge of the malice of sin as I now have, and I have just confessed my sins with such a lively sorrow, and such a firm resolution, that I feel I would bear all the evils in the world, and die a thousand times rather than commit another mortal sin; nor, in fact, have I any desire or inclination now for carnal pleas-

ures, but rather horror and dread at the thought of offending God and exposing myself to the danger of eternal damnation. Therefore I am fully persuaded that I run no danger now by keeping that person in my house, or by going into that company, in order to satisfy the requirements of friendship, as the law of Christian charity commands. What a sudden change has come over you! It may be as you say, and if it is, you ought to rejoice and to thank God from the bottom of your heart. But let me give you one piece of advice; do not trust too much to the future, nor venture again into the occasion of sin, or you will certainly find that your present firm purpose and your horror of sin will soon come to naught.

This resolution will not be kept long. Shown by a simile.

The Prophet Isaias says of sinners that they multiply their offences as spiders make their webs: "They have woven the webs of spiders."[1] When a man sees a spider's web on the wall or the window of his room he calls at once to his servant and says to him: See what is hanging there; is that all the care you take of my room? Get your broom and sweep it away at once. The servant obeys, and in a few moments the room is quite clean. But in a few days' time the man sees the cobwebs there again. What is the meaning of this, he asks his servant, did I not tell you to be more careful? What is the use of my paying you your wages if you do not do what I tell you? Sir, answers the servant, I swept away the cobwebs when you told me to do so; there must be some fresh ones there since. But, says the master, it is not enough to sweep away the cobwebs, you must kill the spiders, or else they will begin a fresh web every day. "Decline from evil,"[2] says the Lord to the sinner; amend your sinful life; away with the webs of vice. And what does the sinner do? Driven by the anguish of his conscience, or touched by something he has heard in a sermon, or moved by the fear of death in a dangerous illness, he makes a general confession and repents of his sins with a firm resolution to avoid them in future. Thus he sweeps away the cobwebs from his soul. But what follows? In a short time the webs are there again; he falls into grievous sin. How does that happen? The spider is not yet killed; the proximate occasion of sin is not removed, and, as sure as he goes into it again, he falls, no matter how firm his purpose of amendment was.

But he will fall again.

Have you done penance? asks St. John Chrysostom; have you repented of your sins and blotted them out? If so, I con-

[1] Telas araneæ texuerunt.—Isa. lix. 5.

[2] Declina a malo.—Ps. xxxvi. 27.

gratulate you with all my heart; "but are you therefore changed into a stone or into iron?"[1] No; you are and remain straw, as you were before; "can you, then, touch fire and not be burnt?"[2] Therefore I implore of you to remain away from the fire, no matter how firm your resolution is. You are now, says St. Peter Chrysologus, like a fire that is extinguished, but is still smoking, for the heat is not gone out of it altogether; all it requires to make it shoot up again into flame is to put a little fire into it, or to blow on it. Try it with a candle; blow the candle out, and immediately hold it to another lighted one, and, even before the wick touches the flame, it will take fire. So it is also with the proximate occasion of sin, especially in the matter of impurity. No knowledge on the part of the understanding, no purpose or resolution on the part of the will, is of any use; you have detested your sins from the bottom of your heart, and are firmly determined rather to die a thousand times than to commit them again; the candle is blown out; the fire of concupiscence is somewhat subdued; but if you go into the occasion again, into the society of the person with whom you have so often sinned, the pleasure you formerly enjoyed must of necessity recur to your mind, the former impure love you felt will be awakened in you anew, and the fire of impurity will burst forth into a flame. In the Holy Scripture we find almost the same simile employed to confirm this truth. When the Jews were brought into captivity into Persia, the priests secretly took away the fire that used to burn on the altar and hid it in a well that was dried up. After many years their descendants came back and looked into the well for the fire, but, says the Scripture, "they found no fire, but thick water."[3] The priest Nehemias bade them draw it up, and sprinkle it on the wood that had been placed on the altar, ready for the sacrifice; and behold, hardly was it done, when "there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered."[4] Mark this, my dear brethren, when the fire was placed in the well, which usually contained water, it became water: "they found no fire, but thick water; and when they drew up the water, and used it for the sacrifice, as fire is wont to be used, it became fire again; "there was a great fire kindled, so that all wondered." Now I repeat, O sinner, that after that clear knowledge of the wickedness of sin,

Another simile.

[1] Numquid lapideus es, aut ferreus?—S. Chrysos., hom. 1. in ps. l.
[2] Igni conjungeris, et non ardebis?
[3] Non invenerunt ignem, sed aquam crassam.—II. Mach. i. 20.
[4] Accensus est ignis magnus, ita ut omnes mirarentur.—Ibid. 22.

of which you speak, the heartfelt sorrow you feel for having offended God, and the firm purpose rather to die a thousand times than commit sin, the fire of your former carnal desires does not burn so fiercely, and your soul is turned, as it were, into water by your tears of penance; but if you go again into that house or company in which the fire of sensuality formerly overcame you, the water will soon be changed into a fire which will consume your soul worse than before.

For even the place in which one has sinned is dangerous.

Therefore St. Paul warns us, saying, "give not place to the devil;"[1] for even the place, says St. Isidor, in which one has sinned becomes dangerous, since the mind recalls what occurred there, and thus awakens desires anew; much more, then, will the actual, living presence of the person with whom one has sinned have that effect. "Where art Thou?"[2] said the Lord to Adam after he had sinned. Did not God know that Adam had hidden himself in the garden, full of shame and confusion at the transgression of which he now realized the full enormity? Certainly, He knew it well; and, as St. John Chrysostom says, He did not ask in order to find out where Adam was, but to remind him that he was still in the place in which he had sinned, after having repented of his guilt. Adam, where art Thou? In the garden. Away with you at once; the place is dangerous for you; if you look at the forbidden tree again, the desire to eat of its fruit will again come to you; therefore you must go away at once. "And the Lord God sent him out of the paradise of pleasure,"[3] and placed an angel with a fiery sword at the entrance, so that he might never return to the place where he had sinned. O sinner! since you now acknowledge your guilt and repent of it, let me ask you, "where art thou?" Where do you intend to remain for some time to come? In the house where that person is still living? In the house or company where you will often meet with that person? Ah, that is no place for you! You must never go there any more; the entrance to it must be closed to you, or else the old Adam will get possession of you again.

It is a snare of the devil that one does not feel temptation in the occasion.

You say that you do not feel any temptation any longer, and that all sinful desire seems to have left you. If that is the case, why are you so anxious to see that person again? Why are you so troubled when he or she is absent? Why do you find it so difficult to break off that intimacy? That is an evident, unmis-

[1] Nolite locum dare diabolo!—Ephes. iv. 27. [2] Ubi es?—Gen. iii. 9.
[3] Et emisit eum Dominus Deus de paradiso voluptatis.—Ibid. 23.

takable sign that you have still something left to fight against in secret, and that the sinful desire has not entirely abandoned you. If you really feel no temptation any more, then one of three things must be true: either the devil does not know you any longer, as the Abbot Apollo once said to a religious who had never experienced a temptation from which the holiest servants of God are not free, in spite of their penitential lives; or the devil takes no further trouble about you, as he knows that he is sure of you while you are in that occasion; for a dog does not bark at the friends of the house, but only at strangers whom he does not know, and so perhaps the hellish dog looks on you as one of his own, since he leaves you in peace; or else he is deceiving you, and is preparing some trap to ensnare you, since he now refrains from tempting you after you have done penance, in order to be more sure of bringing you to destruction afterwards.

Shown by a simile.

This crafty enemy sometimes acts with souls like the Norman prince, Hastings. The latter, having besieged for a long time unsuccessfully the Italian town of Luna, at last commanded all hostilities against the town to cease, and caused the rumor to be spread about that he, the general in chief of the besieging army, had suddenly taken ill and died. The news of his supposed death was brought to the citizens by an envoy, who made known to them at the same time the last will of the prince, namely, that his body should be carried in state to the cathedral of the town, to which he left a rich legacy, and be there buried. The citizens believed the story, and that all the more readily as hostilities had ceased for such a considerable time. Hastings was then brought into the town, accompanied by a number of courtiers and officers, and some thousands of soldiers bearing lighted torches. While the citizens were admiring the spectacle, the prince suddenly opened his coffin, and, to their greatest astonishment, leaped out into the midst of his men, who were all well armed. He was thus enabled to take possession of the gates of the town, and to allow his army to enter, so that, in place of being a corpse himself, he made one of the unfortunate town, and reduced it to subjection. Thus, when the people thought him dead and unable to harm them, he showed them that he was really alive; but they did not learn the fact until he had already subdued them. O mortal, you have, as we have seen, closed the doors of your soul against the devil; you have by repentance and a purpose of amendment placed yourself, as it were,

in a well fortified citadel, where the enemy does not dare to attack you. But I beg of you, keep the gate closed fast against him, see that you do not venture to open it once to the proximate occasion of sin. The enemy pretends for a time to be dead; he leaves you in peace; you do not feel carnal desires any more, and you seem to be quite a new man; nay, the next time you go into the occasion, into the presence of that person, he will be careful to keep away from you all evil desires, so that you may come away without sin. Why does he act thus? In order, as St. Gregory says, that, when you think yourself safe and removed from all danger, so that you go fearlessly into the occasion, he may suddenly surprise you, fan into a more violent flame than ever the sinful desires that seemed to you to be quite extinguished, and thus make sure of bringing you to eternal ruin.

Many are thus betrayed. Shown by an example.

Oh, how many there are like you, who made even a far stronger resolution to remain steadfast in their fidelity to God, and who have found out by sad experience the truth of this! For, though they did not seek the occasion deliberately, but happened on it by chance, their good resolutions were thrown to the winds, and they became worse than before. Father Paul Segneri of our Society, in his book called "the Christian Man," tells us of a thief who, while he was in prison, under sentence of death, repented of his sins, and made a good general confession of his whole life, and accepted his death as a well merited punishment, with full resignation to the will of God. As he was being led out to execution, to his great and perhaps eternal misfortune, he passed by a house in which a person with whom he had formerly maintained an unlawful intercourse was looking out of the window; the sight of her inflamed his desires anew, he consented to them, and was immediately delivered over to the executioner. You may see from this, my dear brethren, what great power the proximate occasion, though it has been long abandoned, has over the human heart. There was a man who a moment before had repented of his sins with true contrition, and was going out to meet his death, which he accepted with resignation to the will of God, so that there was only the gallows between him and his Judge; he had the crucifix in his hand and his confessor at his side; he was surrounded by people who were praying for his soul, knowing well that he would be in eternity in a few moments; and that man was so changed by a chance sight of a person with whom he had been accustomed to sin long before, that neither the justice of man, which had con-

demned him to death, nor the justice of God, which would condemn him immediately after to the flames of hell, could extinguish in him the fire of impure love. O my God, who, then, will dare to trust himself wantonly into the occasion of sin? Can you, O sinner, believe that you may rely so firmly on the good resolution you made in confession, that the occasion of sin has no dangers for you?

Even if one were to keep his resolution, it would still be dangerous to go into the occasion.

O no! "If thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee." No matter how great the change you think has come over you, pluck out the eye that has hitherto been the occasion of sin to you, and throw it far away from you. Even supposing there were no danger of your committing sin in the company of that person (and if one uses the means that confessors generally prescribe at first, the proximate occasion may be turned into a remote one; but that is seldom done; and in the matter of impurity, when they who have an improper affection for each other live in the same house, or are in the habit of seeing each other frequently, it is almost impossible), supposing, I say, there is no danger of sin for you, how do you know that there is none for the other person? The latter you certainly place in the proximate occasion of impure thoughts and desires by your presence or conversation. Nor will I say anything now of the scandal you give the whole neighborhood, who are, perhaps, aware of the unlawful intercourse you have been maintaining. Therefore I repeat that it is not lawful for you to remain in such an occasion, or to seek it again; but you are bound, under pain of grievous sin, to remove it altogether and to avoid it completely.

I will go to that person to convert her, and for no other purpose; third excuse.

I am well aware of all that has been said hitherto, thinks a third by way of excuse; but I will, at all events, go to that person once more and represent the dangerous state in which we have both been living, so that by fraternal correction I may perhaps induce him or her to do penance like me, and thus we may change our former unlawful love into a holy friendship, which will not hurt us; if I do not do that, the poor soul will probably continue in the state of sin and be lost forever. What a pious, holy zeal for souls you have all of a sudden! I imagine the devil must have a hearty laugh at your devotion. Do you think you can convert souls by your presence and conversation, and save them from the jaws of the hellish wolf, although it is only very recently and with great trouble that you have succeeded in escaping him yourself? You are not afraid to venture on the

conversion of a soul from sinful lust by presenting to her the object of her passion, that is, yourself. You wish by your presence and conversation to inspire a soul with a horror of the vice of impurity, and to lead her to love God above all things, and that, too, the soul whom you have led so far astray, that for the sake of carnal pleasure she has more than once renounced God and heaven, so that she could not be brought to see the error of her ways by preaching or exhortation, or by the divine inspirations? You wish to preach penance to a soul who has so perverted you, that you have often given yourself over to the devil and to the eternal flames of hell? I am very much afraid that you are hardly clever enough to bring such a great undertaking as that to a successful conclusion.

They will both fall again into sin.

I know well that the Holy Ghost has imposed on you by the wise Ecclesiasticus the duty of helping your neighbor to be converted and to save his soul: "Recover thy neighbor," He says; but hear what He adds immediately after: "recover thy neighbor according to thy power, and take heed to thyself that thou fall not;"[1] that is, do not attempt anything above your strength, and be careful that in trying to help him you do not injure yourself. If a heavy burden is placed on a newly-built wall, that is not yet dried, it will fall down. You have been only recently restored to the grace and friendship of God, and yet do you trust so much in your virtue and strength that you are not afraid to undertake such a difficult and important business as the conversion of a soul, and that, too, in such circumstances and by such means as God has strictly forbidden, lest your soul should be perverted again? Which is the more likely, asks St. Gregory of Nazianzen, that a man in good health will give strength to a sick man by his company, or that the sick man will infect him who is in good health? The latter is more likely, and is generally the case, when there is question of a contagious illness. You may be quite certain that your presence and company will infect the person whom you visit in that way with another spiritual malady, that is, you will at least cause her to commit a mortal sin in thought, while you yourself will not come away without having imbibed some of the poison.

Shown by an example.

About nineteen years ago I was told by a priest that he once heard the confession of a man who was at the last extremity, and who shed tears of sorrow while telling his sins. Hardly had the

[1] Recupera proximum secundum virtutem tuam, et attende tibi ne incidas.—Ecclus. xxix. 27.

priest left the house, when a woman came running after him, weeping and trembling in every limb, who begged him to come back; could you guess why, my dear brethren? When the priest left the house, that woman, who had been an occasion of sin and a stumbling-block of scandal to the sick man, entered the room of the latter with the pious intention of helping him and praying for him (ah, would that she had never thought of such a thing!) and the unhappy man, with death already in his face, gathered all his remaining strength together, and gave her to understand that he had consented anew to unchaste desires. The woman, horrified at this, ran after the priest, who tried to move the dying man to repentance, both by prayers and threats; but whether he succeeded, or not, is doubtful. This is an example worthy of deep consideration; the person who had been the occasion of sin to that man thought she could enter his room in his dying moments, for a good and holy purpose, but in reality she was the cause of the greatest misfortune and perhaps of eternal damnation to him. A nearly similar incident is related by Father Joseph Prola, of our Society, of a young man in Italy. The latter had kept up an improper intimacy for some time, but at length, enlightened by a ray of divine grace, he repented of his sins, and made up his mind to give up that sinful intimacy and to be converted to God with all his heart. Full of this intention, he set to work and wrote down a general confession of his whole life, with which he hastened to a confessor; but as he was on the way, the devil inspired him with the thought of going to see his accomplice in guilt, in order to persuade her to do the same, and to repent of her sins. The foolish young man took this thought as an inspiration of God; he goes to the house, and finds the person there alone. At the first sight of her, all his repentance vanished at once; the fire of impure love was kindled anew; he made up his mind to sin with her once more, and hardly had he come to that conclusion, when another young man, a rival of his, entered the house and plunged a dagger into his heart; thus his unhappy soul was hurried down to hell while he actually had his general confession on his person. That is what must be expected when one goes again into the proximate occasion of sin, even under the pretext of devotion and with the intention of doing good to others.

Conclusion and exhortation to shun the

No, no; in such circumstances there is no safety unless in flight. And if you wish to convert the person with whom you have sinned, then, says St. Gregory, the only advice I can give

occasion completely.

you is to do it "not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" not with exhortation and advice, nor even by letter, but in deed and in truth, that is, by good example. Keep away from that person; do not take any notice of her if she should salute you, or send messages to you by others; send back her letters unopened; shut your door in her face and act towards her as if she were your mortal enemy. Then she may perhaps enter into herself and say: that man is evidently quite changed; it is clear that he is really converted; I must follow his example. If she does not follow it, then, at all events, you have done what God required of you, and have placed your own soul in safety. In a word, without attempting to seek any excuses, "flee from sins as from the face of a serpent;"[1] dread the occasion of sin, as you would a venomous reptile. Commentators on this passage ask why God does not tell us to fly sin as a raging lion or tiger, for such animals could do us more harm than a mere crawling reptile? And they answer by saying that those animals, although they are cruel and dangerous, are not to be feared at all times; for while they are young, one can play with them without running any risk; nay, they may be tamed so that they run after the person who feeds them, as if they were faithful dogs; a fact which experience abundantly proves. On the other hand, serpents are always to be feared; they can never be tamed, and whether they are young or old, they can always kill a man, if they but touch him with their poisonous fangs. Therefore we must avoid the occasion of sin as we would a serpent; and under no pretext are we allowed to go into the proximate occasion; no subterfuge or excuse will exempt us from this obligation. If you do not wish, then, to lose your soul, there is nothing else for you but flight. Fly the occasion. Amen.

TWENTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE EXCUSE OF THE SINNER WHO SAYS THAT HE CANNOT AVOID THE OCCASION.

Subject.

The proximate occasion can and must be avoided at once; no matter what excuse is alleged to the contrary.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Epiphany.*

[1] Quasi a facie colubri fuge peccata.—Ecclus. xxi. 2.

Text.

Cum autem creverit, majus est omnibus oleribus, et fit arbor. —Matt. xiii. 32.

"When it is grown up, it is greater than all herbs, and becometh a tree."

Introduction.

To prevent a tree from growing in your garden, where you do not wish to have it, nothing more is necessary at first, than for a little bird to carry off the seed. And if the young plant has already made its appearance over ground, all you have to do is to catch it with both hands and pull it up, root and all. But if it once grows to a tree, then the birds, with their picking, and the hands, with their pulling, cannot force it out of the ground. It must be cut down with the axe, and the roots carefully dug up. It is the same, my dear brethren, with the dangerous occasion of sin. The daily occasions, common to all men, which arise from company and society that one cannot avoid, are, so to speak, the little seedlings, from which sin remotely springs; and in such occasions it is enough for one to have recourse to God by daily prayer, and to keep his outward senses and his heart free from any disorderly affection. The frequent and unnecessary intercourse of the sexes, which is allowed under pretence of amusement, is a far more dangerous occasion of sin; but the only difficulty in avoiding sin, even in that case, is to keep away from such promiscuous gatherings, unless necessity or decency requires otherwise, and not to seek such occasions deliberately. But if the intimacy has grown into a tree, that is, if it has become a proximate occasion, so that sin is generally committed on account of it, especially in the matter of impurity, then, indeed, great labor and trouble are necessary to break off that intimacy, to remove the occasion, and to tear up the roots of sin. Uncertainty of death! Strict justice of God! Eternal joys of heaven! Eternal torments of hell! you may be represented a hundred times in sermons; but you are of hardly any use in moving the hearts of those who are once entangled in such an occasion, to make up their minds firmly to avoid it altogether. For, not only do such people seek all sorts of vain pretexts to deceive themselves and to persuade themselves that they are not bound to shun it, as we have seen in the last sermon, but, as a last resource, they put forward as an excuse what they call the insuperable difficulty of shunning it.

Plan of Discourse.

I cannot, or I cannot yet, they say, avoid or remove the proximate occasion. But I say that you can and must remove and avoid it at once, no matter what you urge to the contrary. Such is the whole subject of this sermon. I hope firmly, with the help of God, that it concerns no one here present, and that the only good they will derive from this sermon will be that they who were formerly in the proximate occasion may thank God for having freed them from it, while all the others may shun the least occasion of evil before it develops into a proximate occasion.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O God, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Immaculate Mother, and of our holy guardian angels, who are most careful of the salvation of those entrusted to them.

First excuse: I will do away with the occasion gradually; I cannot leave it all at once.

Let us hear the first excuse. What is the reason that you cannot remove or avoid the proximate occasion? Ah, the answer is, I find it too hard and almost impossible to leave that house or that company, or to shun completely a person whom I have known for such a long time. I will try to give up the occasion little by little, and to reduce the number of my visits week by week, until at length I can give up going altogether. Ah! I see the knot is a hard one for you to loosen; you think you will be able to do it by degrees; but that will not do. You must cut the knot, not loosen it, says St. Paulinus.[1] If you really wish, you can keep from all grievous sins, for God has given you absolute freedom in the matter; therefore you can also give up at once the proximate occasion of grievous sin; for God has commanded you, under pain of grievous sin, to shun the proximate occasion. We must leave sin, not gradually, but at once and forever. God will not make peace with his enemies gradually, but at once and for all time. To be determined to sin in this week, and to lessen the number of your sins gradually in the succeeding weeks, is not doing penance and being converted, but rather going off gradually farther from God, and nearer to the eternal flames of hell.

How foolish that is! Shown by a simile.

Tell me, what would you think if one, wishing to go to Metz, says to himself: the road is very long and difficult, I could not do the journey in a day on foot; I will go by the Moselle, although it leads in the opposite direction; the first day I will travel six hours, the second four, the third three, and by thus lessening the distance daily, I will, no doubt, arrive at Metz in good time. Eh?

[1] Succide, non solvas.

Foolish man that you are, you would say to him with reason; it is true, you are travelling shorter distances every day; but still you are going every day farther from Metz; and if you continue that, you will never arrive there. That is exactly the folly you are guilty of when you determine to break off the occasion of sin little by little. It is too difficult, you say, to give up that person's friendship all at once; it must be a work of time. Will it, then, be easier for you after you have given way still more to your carnal appetites? Easier, when the fire burns more fiercely? Easier, when the sinful habit has become more inveterate? Certainly not. The deeper the wound, the more difficult it is to cure. You think you will afterwards get rid of the occasion by degrees. Alas, unfortunate "afterwards," how many souls have you already hurled into hell! I should like to see the strong box, in which you keep your time locked up, so that you can take it out to do penance in, whenever you wish. Now you have the time; now God has given it to you, and now you should use it for your conversion, not little by little, but at once, as God commands you to do under pain of sin. Do away with the occasion of sin immediately, and give up that bad company; who knows what will become of you afterwards?

Second excuse: I am a servant and cannot leave my place till the end of the year.

Others say, I cannot leave the house in which I am in the habit of sinning. Why not? Because I am a servant, and my year's service has not expired; but next October, when my time will be up, I shall try to get another place; till then, I must remain as I am. So the year is not finished for you yet, as far as sin is concerned, and you will go on offending God until next October? How do you know that you will be in better dispositions next October? The chances are that by the end of the year you will become more hardened in vice, and you will re-engage with your present master, and so spend another year in the proximate occasion of sin. And, besides, how do you know that you will live till next October? Perhaps (and it may easily be the case) by next October you may be in hell, where you will have to remain, not for one year, nor two, nor twenty, nor a thousand, but for all eternity, in the midst of all imaginable torments, in a lake of fire and brimstone. Answer this question: if the plague broke out in the house in which you are in service, or if there were a fire even in the neighborhood of it, would you like to remain in it till next October, because your time is not up, and you must wait till it is? I am pretty sure that you would not stop to consider the matter, but would make your escape at once. Is, then, that

plague of the soul, that hellish fire which you find in that house, less to be dreaded by you, than a calamity which affects only the mortal body.

Such persons must leave at once, no matter what follows.

But, you say, I must keep my contract with my master, otherwise I should lose my wages for the whole year, and, besides, if I were to leave now, where could I find a place, since now, in the middle of the year, every family is supplied with servants? Do you, then, prefer to perjure yourself to your God, who has commanded you under pain of hell to leave, rather than to break your contract with a mere mortal, who can at most deprive you of your wages? If you are in earnest about leading a better life, tell your master in confidence of the danger which threatens your soul in his service, and if he is a good Christian, and fears God, he will find some means of removing it, or, if that cannot be done, will give you a good recommendation, along with the wages that are due to you for the period of your service. If your master himself is an occasion of sin to you, and it is unfortunately only too often the case that masters, who ought to give their servants good example, and help them to save their souls, use them simply as a means of gratifying their foul lusts, and thus give them over to the devil; if, I say, it is so with you, then away out of the house with you, at once. It is no place for you, even if you were to lose your wages by going. For you should think a great deal more of the eternal recompense you lose by remaining, than of the few shillings you have to expect from your master. Remember the impressive words of Our Lord: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or, what exchange shall a man give for his soul?[1] Confess the truth to your own conscience: if another master were to promise you fifty dollars more wages, and you were not in the occasion of sin in the house in which you now are, would you hesitate long about accepting this offer, and leaving your present situation? I think not; for fifty dollars a year would more than compensate you for the loss of your present salary. But the great King of heaven and earth promises that, if in obedience to Him you leave the proximate occasion of sin, and overcome yourself, He will give you His grace and favor, and the kingdom of heaven into the bargain; and yet you say, I cannot; I must wait till the end of the year, or I shall lose my wages! Where is your understanding? What

[1] Quid prodest homini, si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur? Aut quam dabit homo commutationem pro anima sua?—Matt. xvi. 26.

has become of your reason? Oh, you say, it is all very well to talk in that way, but who will take me into his service in the middle of the year, and what can I do, if I do not find a place? Whether you find a place or not, and even if you were obliged to beg your bread your whole life long, or, what is still worse, to suffer a painful and disgraceful death, you should make up your mind to do it, rather than offend your God and lose your soul by committing mortal sin. Ah, if you were not held fast by carnal love and sensual pleasure, and if you were in earnest about abandoning sin, I believe you would find ways enough of leaving your present situation, even in the middle of the year, without my saying anything to you about it; but what is wanting in most cases is an earnest resolution to overcome the difficulty and burst the bonds of sinful affection. Is not that so? Your own conscience says, yes.

Third excuse: what will people say if I leave that house, etc.?

I cannot, a third says. And why not? Oh, what would people say, if I were to leave my situation, or the house in which I am lodging, before the end of the year; if I never went to that place to which I have been accustomed to go for such a long time; if I never spoke to that man, with whom I am now known to be on friendly terms; if I sent away that person, who has been with me for so many years? What would people think of me? Oh! And is it that, that makes it almost impossible for you to avoid the proximate occasion of sin? Why do you not take a sensible view of the matter? You say, what will people think of me, if I leave that house, etc.? And I ask you, what will the angels in heaven think of you, if you continue in the indulgence of your sinful passions, and if they see you always adding to the number of your sins? What will the devils think, when they see that you are daily increasing your eternal torments, according to their wish and desire, and in contempt of their Creator? What will the almighty God, who is present in all places, and who sees all you do, think of you, if you continue to offend and insult Him before His very face? What will all mankind, the elect in heaven, and the reprobate in hell, think of you on the Last Day, when they will see you hurried down to hell after having received the sentence of your condemnation? What will you yourself think, when you reflect that, for the sake of a few years' pleasure which you had in that house, you have to suffer the eternal torments of hell?

If people know tha.

But, putting all this aside for the present, although it is of the utmost importance, I will speak of the matter with you accord-

He is in the occasion of sin, his good name is already gone.

ing to the natural light of reason. Either people know and have a well-founded suspicion that you are keeping up an unlawful intimacy with that person, or that the visits you pay are for no good purpose, or they do not know it. One of these two must be the case. Do they know of it? And, indeed, it is, humanly speaking, impossible for a thing of the kind to be kept secret very long in a neighborhood, although you may imagine that no one suspects what you are doing in that house, or the nature of your relations with that person; yet your own behavior and that of your accomplice in guilt is enough, even without the frequent visits you pay, to betray what is going on, so that, while you stupidly think your guilt is known only to yourself and your accomplice, it is, so to speak, town-talk already. Suppose, then, I say, that they are aware of it; do you know what they have thought of you up to the present, and what they will continue to think of you if they see you keeping up that intimacy. They have hitherto thought that you are leading a scandalous life, unbecoming a Christian, and that it would be far better for your spiritual welfare and for your good name before men if you left that house, or sent that person away, or broke off that unlawful connection. The hardest things possible are said of you, everyone is shocked at your conduct, and you make yourself, moreover, responsible for the sins you occasion by your bad example. See, O blind mortal, you do not fear to be made the subject of such talk, and to have such a bad name, as long as you remain in the occasion of sin, and yet you are afraid of what people will think of you if, as you are bound in conscience before God, you avoid that occasion, shun that house, and amend your life! If you do this latter, then I can tell you what all good, pious, and decent people will say of you; they will think and say that you have done quite right; that you should have done it long since; that you are now in earnest about saving your soul and going to heaven; and they will thank God for having given you the grace to get rid of that person, to shun that house, etc. It is no disgrace for people to think of you in that way; it rather helps to restore the good name you have lost by continuing in the occasion of sin.

If they do not know, his reputation will not suffer by his leaving the occasion.

But suppose the people know nothing at all, and have not the least suspicion of the sinful life you are leading; what can they think of you, if you turn that person away, or give up going to that house? Is it such a wonderful thing for one to get rid of a servant, or to seek for another situation, or to break off a friend-

ship? It is done every day in the world, for all sorts of reasons. Sudden changes of the kind are sometimes caused by a few words that one lets drop without meaning any harm by them. Yet, let people say of you what they please, what is it to you, as long as the almighty God has a good opinion of you, and your own conscience approves of what you have done? If a wild ox were to attack you in the street, would you be ashamed to run away, because the people would laugh at you, and point at you? Oh, no; in a danger of that kind you would let the people say what they wish, for your life is more valuable to you than their good words. And you would be quite right. But should you not think a great deal more of your eternal salvation, which is in the greatest danger as long as you are in the proximate occasion of sin? The philosopher Diogenes once saw a young man coming out of a house of ill fame, and the latter blushed with shame at being detected; "do not be ashamed," said the philosopher to him, "of coming out of that house; but be ashamed to go into it."

casion of sin.

It is well known what a temptation the chaste Joseph had in Egypt, when his mistress tried to induce him to commit sin. He refused to listen to her solicitations; but she lost all shame, and threatened to accuse him to her husband of having offered violence to her, if he did not consent to her wishes. How did Joseph act in such dangerous circumstances? Without saying a word, he ran out of the house, leaving his mantle in the hands of his mistress, who had caught hold of it to prevent his flight. You are justly surprised, my dear brethren, at the extraordinary virtue of the young man, and that he was able to defend himself from a danger to which the pious David and the wise Solomon succumbed, and that he immediately took to flight. And, certainly, he has left an example for all time to show how flight is the only means of preserving holy purity from the dangerous occasions of sin. But what surprises me is the fact that he ran out of the house so hurriedly as to leave his mantle behind in the hands of the wicked woman, who sought to seduce him; for he might at least have remained long enough to take it from her, since it would serve as a proof against him. And in reality the woman used it to show that he was in the room, and to substantiate her false charge, so that the innocent Joseph was cast into prison as an adulterer. Why, I ask, was he so incautious as to leave his mantle behind him? Do you know why? Joseph was in such imminent danger of losing his virtue, that he would

No matter what they think, he must leave the occasion, like the chaste Joseph in Egypt.

not stop to dispute with himself as to what he should do; let her keep my mantle, he thought; men may think of me what they please; I must go, and at once, in order to save my soul; I would rather go to prison, than sin against holy purity. That is how the wise Joseph acted. You, too, should do the same, if you are in the occasion of sin; away, out of the house, at once, even if you had to leave everything behind you; and let people think what they will. But you may rest assured that you will not be put in prison, like Joseph, but will rather earn great praise before God and man. Try it, and you will find that what I say is true.

Fourth excuse: that person has been very kind to me, and I expect more kindness from him.

I cannot! sighs a fourth. And why? Because that man has always been so kind to me; he has looked after me as if I were his own child; if it were not for him, I should have to beg my bread, or, at all events, I should find it very hard to make a living; besides, I am in hopes that he will do still more for me; must I now be so ungrateful as to leave him against his will, or to turn him away from me? Oh, no; I cannot bear to be so cruel! But tell me, who has done you the most good, that person, or God? Did that man create you, when you were still in the abyss of nothingness? Did he redeem you, when you were lost? Did he shed his blood for you? Did he die a shameful death for you? Did he save you from the flames of hell? All that your God has done for you. From whom have you the greatest help and happiness to expect? Can that man free you from the attacks of the devil, and protect you from his cruel machinations? Can he remit the great debts you have contracted with God by your sins? Will he lighten the anguish of your last moments, give you the grace of holy perseverance, and bring you to heaven? The good God, who is faithful to His promises, has undertaken to do all this for you, if you abandon your senseless love for creatures, and serve Him alone in future. But, ungrateful mortal that you are, you despise and abandon your sovereign Benefactor, and attach yourself to a vile creature, destined to be the food of worms, who with all his caresses and kindness, is preparing you for nothing else but perpetual hunger and thirst in the flames of hell. God preserves you and has looked after your welfare even while you were offending Him in the occasion of sin; and now you are afraid you will have to suffer want if you make up your mind to be His true and faithful friend in future? You should have more confidence in that good and loving Father, who feeds the ravens and the sparrows, although they sow not,

and neither do they reap; and who is so much more careful of His rational creatures, that He Himself warns us in the Gospel not to be solicitous for the morrow, nor to be troubled as to what we shall eat or drink, or as to wherewith we shall be clothed; for our heavenly Father knows what we are in need of, and will provide for us, if we only do His holy will. "I have been young," says the Prophet David, "and now am old," and I have seen a great many things during my time; but "I have not seen the just forsaken, nor his seed seeking bread;" [1] nor have I ever heard that the just man, who trusts in God, has suffered such want as to die of hunger. Is it not God Himself who says to us, "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God. . . and all these things shall be added unto you:" [2] namely, food, and clothing, and every other necessary of life? Do you, then, trust in the devil, the father of lies, and in a mere mortal, who is leading you to the devil, rather than in the almighty God, who tells you to leave that person, quit that house, shun the proximate occasion of sin, and serve Him alone? "Seek first the kingdom of God," and you may rely on His promise that all the other things shall be added unto you. He will provide for your support, and will give you, moreover, eternal riches in His heavenly kingdom. Even if by leaving that person you were to be reduced to extreme poverty, you must not forget that you deserve it on account of your sins, and that you ought to do severe penance by right. Even the holiest and most innocent men have given up all they possessed and became voluntarily poor, in order to make surer of heaven; and you, who have so often deserved eternal poverty in hell, should you not make up your mind to suffer a little want in this life, in order to save your soul?

Fifth excuse: we made a mutual promise of marriage.

I cannot, exclaims a fifth. And why not? Because, says a maid-servant, or a daughter of the house, I have already promised to marry that man; and if I go away now, he will not keep his word, and all my happiness in life is ruined forever. But even if you have made a mutual promise of marriage, you are not allowed, on that account, to do what is wrong with each other, although there are many people ignorant enough to think that a promise of marriage renders everything lawful between the contracting parties. Such, I repeat, is not the case; nothing more, even in thought or desire, is allowed to you than to others. Do you intend to marry? Then do so as soon as possible; or, else,

[1] Junior fui, etenim senui; et non vidi justum derelictum, nec semen ejus quærens panem.—Ps. xxxvi. 25.

[2] Quærite ergo primum regnum Dei. . . et hæc omnia adjicientur vobis?—Matt. vi. 33.

avoid each other's company, if there is danger of sin in it. Unhappy, indeed, is the marriage, as experience teaches, which has been preceded by sin. How can the blessing of God, or happiness, or grace, be expected by those who enter on the married state in opposition to God, and in God's enmity? But I have already said enough on this subject. Fly the occasion, then; you must not go into it even on the pretext of future marriage, for every time you see the person to whom you are engaged, when the presence of that person is an occasion of sin to you, and see him or her alone, you commit a sin.

Sixth excuse: I love the person too much and cannot leave him.

Alas, I cannot, cries out the last. And why? Ah, I am too fond of that person. It seems to me that I am bewitched, and that I can hardly live out of his or her company. Yes, I can easily believe that matters would go so far with you; generally speaking, the only foundation for all the other excuses for not avoiding the proximate occasion is foolish, sinful love. If such is the case with you, then I am sorry for you; all my preaching and exhortation will be of little service to you. But is that really love? To love is to wish well to one, to desire and rejoice at his happiness, and to do him good. Now, can you say that you wish well to him or her, whom you make miserable by your pretended love, and whom you defraud of all rights to heaven, and deliver over to the devil? Is that wishing well to a person, or is it not rather wishing him or her a most frightful evil? Could any greater hatred be imagined between two people, than for them to agree to bring each other's soul to eternal damnation? "If you love a person ill," says St. Augustine, "then you hate him."[1] If you really wish to love the person with whom you commit sin, then you must hate him, and shun him as your worst enemy; "if you hate well, then you love in reality."[2]

This latter is a desperate case.

Yet you think that your love is truly deserving of the name, and so, in order to please the object of it, you have made up your mind to go to hell, for nothing else can come of it. If that is the way with you, please yourself, and lose your soul; I cannot help you! But one request I must make of you. A man does not determine to throw a large stone into the air until he first sees whether he can lift it off the ground. You, too, should try first whether you can bear the pains of hell, I will not say forever, but for a very short time; nay, not even the fire of hell, for we have no experience of that here; but, like the hermit of old,

[1] Si male amaveris, tunc odisti.—S. Aug. tract. 51, in Joan.
[2] Si bene oderis, tunc amasti.—Ibid.

when he was tempted to impurity, put your finger in the fire, and see if you can hold it there while you say one "Miserere," for the love of that person. Can you do that? Then try if you can keep your hand in the fire a whole day for that person's sake; and if, as I am sure would be the case, that would seem too much for you, then should I cry out to you: oh, think of that person! will you not bear something for his sake? Ah! you would answer, clenching your teeth with pain, I cannot bear it any longer. But if you cannot bear to hold your hand or your finger in the fire for a day, or for as long as it takes to say the "Miserere," how will you bear to burn and roast in hell for all eternity, body and soul? If, nevertheless, you are so far gone in your madness as to resolve to expose yourself to such a terrible fate, then you must know that, when you both shall go down into hell, and that may occur to you at any moment by a sudden death, you will regard each other with the greatest hatred and aversion, and against no one shall your curses and execrations be more bitter for all eternity, than against the person who is now the object of your foolish passion.

Exhortation to leave the occasion, in spite of difficulties.

But, for God's sake, think of what you are doing! Leave at once, of your own free will and for the love of God, the person whom death will deprive you of one day against your will. Is it not better for you to give up for a short and uncertain time that unlawful affection, and thereby to become a friend of God, to enjoy peace of conscience, and to gain heaven as a reward, than to lose that same person forever, and also the society of the angels, of Mary, the Mother of God, and of the saints, and, besides that, to suffer the loss of your own body and soul? Alas, does it require all these arguments to convince a Christian that he must give up an unlawful love for one who will soon be the food of worms? Heathens and Turks, where are ye? I should, it seems to me, have less trouble with you on this head.

Heroic act of a Turk in this matter.

By way of conclusion, my dear brethren, I will relate to you a heroic deed performed by a barbarian, in the year 1481. The celebrated Mahomet II. had a courtier whose advice he used to seek in every emergency, and to whom he gave full permission to speak out his mind freely on every subject connected with the welfare of the country. This courtier took courage on one occasion, and spoke in these terms to his sovereign: "The whole world wonders at your majesty's glory and power; compared to other monarchs, you are like the sun among the planets; every battle you have fought has been a victory for you; you have

subjected to your sway six kingdoms, twenty provinces, and two hundred towns. There is only one thing (forgive me for mentioning it) which sullies your glory and lessens the greatness of your name before the world; and if it were not for that, you would be the greatest monarch on earth." "What is that?" asked Mahomet in anger. "It is," answered the courtier, "your too great friendship with Irene; and it is made a subject of frequent complaint that such a brave man should allow himself to be led by a woman." Irene was a young girl, whose beauty and attractions had captivated Mahomet's heart, so that he loved her more than himself. But hear what happened. Mahomet, without showing the least sign of emotion, sent for her; she came into his presence, and her beauty at once attracted the attention of every one. She greeted Mahomet in her usual manner, and then the latter, turning to his courtier, said: "you will now see that, after I have conquered so many nations, I will not allow the love of a woman to tarnish my glory, but that I can also conquer my own inclinations." Having said these words, he drew his sword, and with one blow cut off the head of his beloved Irene. It was an act of barbarous cruelty, which cannot be approved of; yet it was a wonderful act of heroism in a man to gain such a victory over himself.

He will rise up in judgment against Christians.

What do you think of this, my dear brethren? A monarch, who was subject to no one, an infidel, a Turk, influenced solely by the advice of his courtier, so quickly, nay, so cruelly, got rid of one whom he had loved more than himself, and whose love, according to the Turkish law, was not unlawful for him, simply because she seemed to lessen a little his glory before the world; and a Christian cannot determine to abandon an intimacy which is unlawful for him, and which not only takes away his good name before the world, but also deprives him of all right to heaven! O sinner, this Turk shall one day rise up in judgment against you! Your friends and acquaintances, who know of the sinful life you are leading, warn you; preachers and confessors, who cannot free you from mortal sin as long as you are in the occasion of sin, exhort you; your own uneasy conscience troubles you; your angel guardian speaks to you by his inspirations; God Himself tells you to pluck out the eye that has been a scandal to you, and to cast it from you. Are you still deaf to all these exhortations?

Conclusion and resolution.

Quickly, then; do not hesitate any longer! What appears to you now difficult and almost impossible will, sometime after

you have done it, be easy and pleasant. You will rejoice and thank God a thousand times for having saved you from that slavery, as I have heard of many like you doing. Make, then, this resolution with me: away with everything in the world that has kept me away from God. Farewell, O creature, whom I have hitherto loved more than God! I will have nothing to do with you any more. I know you no longer. I prefer my soul, my supreme good, to you. Heaven, with its eternal joys, is too beautiful to be sacrificed for your sake. Hell, with its torments, is too terrible for me to go there for your sake. I have now resolved, once for all, to save my soul, to go to heaven, to serve my God, and to love Him steadfastly above all things. Amen.

ON DISCLOSING ONE'S SINS IN CONFESSION.

TWENTY-NINTH SERMON.

ON THE CHOICE OF A GOOD CONFESSOR.

Subject.

He who is in earnest about making a good confession must choose a good confessor.—*Preached on the ninth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Quia si cognovisses et tu, et quidem in hac die tua, quæ ad pacem tibi.—Luke xix. 42.

"If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace."

Introduction.

Unhappy Jerusalem, it is certainly high time for thee to open thy eyes, now that thou hast in thy midst the Saviour of the world, who, in His own person, calls out to thee, and offers thee eternal salvation, and invites thee to repent of thy sins and be converted to God! The time will come when thou wilt have to open thy eyes; but it will then be too late; for thou hast not known the time of thy visitation. This was the thought that drew tears from the eyes of the compassionate Jesus at the sight of the city. Sinful Christian, "if thou also hadst known," such are the words the same merciful God so often speaks to your heart; if you only knew the unhappy state in which you are, and the graces that are now offered you. I have prepared for you, in the sacrament of penance, a necessary, easy, and advantageous means, by which you can escape eternal destruction and save your soul; but woe to you if you disregard that means, or defer

the use of it too long! The time will come when your enemies will surround you in your death-struggle, and will carry off your despairing soul into the abyss of hell, because you have allowed the time of grace to pass by. Is it not deplorable, my dear brethren, that, although we can free ourselves from the miserable state of sin at any moment, there are yet so many who do not wish to be converted, or who, although they approach the sacred tribunal of penance, do not receive that sacrament as they ought? What a number of Catholics go to confession, but what a few, I fear, who really deserve the name of penitent. Alas! how many bad confessions are made; how many grievous faults are committed, with regard to this sacrament, which turn a useful and easy remedy into a deadly poison! We shall see what these faults are, as I go on explaining one by one the different parts of confession. To-day I make a beginning by speaking of the choice of a confessor, in which choice many show that they are not in earnest about their confession.

Plan of Discourse.

He who is in earnest about making a good confession must choose a good confessor. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

O dear Saviour, who didst weep over our sins, give us all light and grace to this end, through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

One must give all lawyers and physicians the credit of knowing their business.

What is the meaning of saying that one must choose a good confessor? Are not all confessors the same, as far as their office is concerned? They all have ears to hear my sins. They have a tongue to give me absolution, and to impose a salutary penance on me. They have all received power from God in their ordination to free me from my sins. That is all very true, as you say; but I, too, have a question to ask you. You have, let us suppose, an important lawsuit on hand, on which depends the loss or gain of a large sum of money; or else your wife, or husband, or only child is threatened with a serious illness. What would you do in both those circumstances? You would at once look out for a clever lawyer to manage the lawsuit, and for an experienced doctor to attend to the sick person. Quite right. But, of course, it makes no matter what lawyer or doctor you employ? One is as good as another, and you can take the first you find? God forbid, you say; the thing is too important for that; I must have the very best I can get. But is not one lawyer as good as another, one doctor as good as another, at least as far as their

profession is concerned? The lawyers have all pen and ink to write down a statement of your case; and all doctors are able to write a prescription for you, and to send it to the apothecary's to be made up. They all have their degree in law or medicine, along with full power from the lawful authorities to practise their profession publicly.

Yet, in an important law-suit, or a dangerous illness, one selects the best lawyer or doctor.

Yes, you say, that is true; but still there is a difference. One is more learned and clever than the other; nothing very wonderful has yet been heard of that doctor or lawyer; I will not be the first to entrust an important case, or the health of one who is dear to me, to one of whom I know nothing. They may be good enough in their way, but they are not good enough for me. In any case, I have to pay, and so I will get the best doctor or lawyer I can for my money, that I may be all the more certain of gaining my case, or of having him or her, who is so dear to me, restored to health. And you are quite right to act thus in a matter of such importance. If you did otherwise, if it were a matter of indifference to you whom you employed, I should be inclined to say that you did not care whether you gained the case or not, or whether the sick person recovered or not. Generally speaking, people are so careful in affairs of the kind, that rich men are sometimes not satisfied with the doctor who usually attends them, but call in, at great expense to themselves, the services of some one who has a great name before the world for skill and experience. Louis XI., king of France, selected as his doctor the most celebrated physician in the whole country, and gave him a monthly salary of ten thousand crowns to attend on him. He certainly did not consider it a matter of indifference who his doctor was.

The sinner is dangerously ill, and he has an important law-suit on hand.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. If we are so careful in things that concern our mortal bodies and our temporal and transitory goods, should we use less care in a matter on which the welfare of our immortal souls and our eternity depend? "If," says St. Augustine, "the best doctors are sought for to cure the diseases of the body, how much more skill should not he have who is to cure our souls?"[1] Your soul, O sinner, lies sick of a most grievous malady, that one, only soul of yours, which, if it dies, or anything happens to it, dies and is lost forever. You are engaged in a lawsuit, and that with the almighty God; if you lose it, then soul and body, God and heaven,

[1] Si morbis corporum medici probatiores exquiruntur, quanto magis spiritualibus animarum adhibendi sunt medici subtiliores? –S. Aug., L. 1, de visitat. infirm.

are lost forever; a lawsuit which already is as good as lost, for the sentence of eternal damnation is pronounced against you, and it will assuredly be carried out, unless you speedily appeal to a more merciful tribunal, that is, to the sacrament of penance.

The confessor is judge, lawyer, and physician.

Your confessor is the lawyer to whom you must entrust your case, or rather he is the judge in the place of God, who has to decide it; and this is the first and chief office of the confessor. He is the physician who has to heal the maladies of your soul, and to preserve you from them in future, prescribing salutary medicines to that effect; and this is the second part of the confessor's duty. In order to fulfil this twofold obligation properly, what great knowledge and prudence, experience and piety, are required.

Hence the sinner must select one who has the knowledge necessary for his office.

In the first place, he must have the necessary knowledge, so as to be able to pronounce judgment on all sins, and to distinguish their different natures and malice; he must know the obligations of different states of life, in order to be able to give the necessary exhortations to his penitent; he must know, in the matter of injustice, whether, to whom, and in what degree his penitent has to make restitution for stolen or unjustly retained goods, for injury done his neighbor's property or character, so that he may not exempt from this obligation one who is bound by it, and thus injure the right of the third party, or impose on his penitent a grievous obligation to which he is not bound; he must know how to act with those who have been addicted to a certain vice for a long time, or who are still in the proximate occasion of sin. He must also be able to decide whether, when, and how he has to give or refuse absolution, that he may not refuse any one that to which the latter has a right, nor give absolution to one who is unworthy of it, and thus allow the holy sacrament to be profaned by a sacrilege. He must know nearly all the sins that are wont to be committed in different states of life, that he may instruct those whom he finds to be ignorant of their duty, and question those who have not carefully examined their conscience. He must know how to deal with the ignorant and simple-minded in things that are necessary to salvation and to the reception of the sacraments, that he may give them the required instruction about absolution, and dispose them to real, supernatural sorrow for their sins. He must know how, according to the sins that have been committed and the circumstances of the person, to give good advice and to suggest means for the amendment of his penitent, and many other things of the kind.

Certainly, no ordinary degree of knowledge is required for this; and if one has it not, or has forgotten it, how can he be a good confessor, that is, a good judge, teacher, and physician of souls? Be on your guard, says the philosopher, against those physicians who, having but a little learning, kill many;[1] who spend their time in visiting, and know how to pay compliments, but know little of their profession, and are good for nothing but to hurry off the sick man somewhat sooner to the grave. Such is the warning that St. Augustine gives to all Christians. "He who wishes to confess his sins," he says, "must seek out a priest who knows how to bind and loose, or else they will both fall into the ditch."[2]

As well as prudence and experience.

In the second place, a confessor must have great prudence, so that he may not be too severe or too lenient with his penitent, but, according to circumstances, be able to unite mildness and affability with a holy zeal and earnestness. For he has to encourage the pusillanimous and to avoid troubling the scrupulous and the shamefaced with his observations, lest he should be the occasion of their concealing a grievous sin through fear and shame; nor must he, by being too exact in his questions, give scandal to the innocent, and perhaps teach them sins of which they were ignorant, and which they would never have known anything about otherwise. Cardinal Hugo says of confessors of this kind, "by being over-exact in questioning, they sometimes make new sinners of those whom they should make new men of."[3] Thirdly, just as one does not like to entrust a serious illness to a physician who has had little experience, no matter how well he has made his studies, so also, in addition to learning and prudence, the confessor must have great experience in hearing confessions.

He must also be a conscientious and pious man.

Finally and principally, he must lead a holy life, so as to do his duty as he ought in the sight of God, and not allow himself to be blinded by human respect or fear in dealing with his penitent; nor keep silent when he should speak; nor flatter when he should reprove; nor permit what he should forbid and condemn; nor give absolution when he should refuse it or defer it; and that he may always meet the sinner with proper patience, mildness, and charity. "If a man is bad to himself, to whom

[1] Qui, parum docti, multos occidunt.

[2] Qui confiteri vult peccata, quærat sacerdotem scientem ligare et solvere, ne ambo in foveam cadant.—S. Aug. lib. de veris et falsis pœnitent.

[3] Nimis inquirentes quandoque faciunt novos peccatores, quos debebant facere novos homines.

will he be good?"[1] says the proverb. He who does not care for his own soul and its salvation will not take much interest in the souls of others. He who is full of filth will not go to much trouble to cleanse others. He who is unfaithful to God in other matters of his duty will not trouble his conscience much about how he performs his duty in the confessional; nor, if he is not enlightened by the Spirit of God, can he be of any avail to enlighten the souls of others or to lead them to God.

This is all specially required for the sacrament of penance.

In the other sacraments it is a matter of indifference, as far as the recipient is concerned, of what kind the priest is from whom he receives them, whether he is learned or ignorant, pious or wicked, as long as he has the necessary power, uses the necessary outward signs, and has the necessary intention when uttering the words of the form. Holy and valid is baptism; holy and valid, the sacrifice of the Mass; holy and valid, confirmation and Extreme Unction, although they are administered by an ignorant or impious priest or bishop; for the sins of the minister cannot hurt him who is baptized, confirmed, anointed, or who hears the holy Mass. But it is quite different with the sacrament of penance, in which the confessor must act the part of a learned judge and of a skilled physician; and if he is wanting in the necessary knowledge, prudence, virtue, and piety, then, indeed, the unfortunate souls of his penitents have a bad lawyer to plead their cause, and a bad physician to attend to their diseases. If it happens now and then that one or another of them, who is well prepared for confession, and who has told his sins properly, is validly absolved, there are on the other hand twenty for that one who are not helped as they ought to be before God, and who, on account of the want of the proper dispositions, and of the will to fulfil their obligations, to which their confessor does not exhort them, go away from the confessional with the guilt of their sins still on their souls.

Not all who say they are confessors have those qualities.

Come on now with your excuse that it does not matter what confessor you choose, since one is as good as another, and one can absolve you as well as another! Do you mean to say that they have all the same learning and prudence, and that they are all equally experienced, pious, and conscientious? A likely thing indeed! "As star differs from star in brightness," says St. Augustine, "so does one priest differ from another,"[2] as far as the performance of his duty is concerned. I am not

[1] Qui sibi nequam, cui bonus?

[2] Sicut stella differt a stella in claritate, sic sacerdos differt a sacerdote. —S. Aug., lib. de visitat. infirm.

preaching to confessors to-day, and therefore I will say nothing of their faults. Would to God that there were not to-day amongst Catholic priests some of those of whom the Lord complains, by the Prophet Ezechiel: "They violated Me among My people, for a handful of barley and a piece of bread, to kill souls which should not die, and to save souls alive which should not live."[1] Such are, according to the explanation of St. Gregory, those confessors who are severe with the innocent and lenient to the wicked; who are harsh to poor, simple, pious souls, and have not a word of reproof for great sinners, either through human respect, or because they hope for something from them, and, after having heard their sins, absolve them at once, although they may be in the habit of sin, without any effort to amend, or in the proximate occasion of sins against purity; thus they declare as living those who are really dead, and they damn themselves with their penitents.

Therefore those penitents are to be deplored who seek out incapable confessors.

There is one thing, which belongs more properly to the subject of my sermon, and which I must deplore rather than reprove; and that is, that there are Christians who, when they have sinned, not only do not care what confessor they may happen on, and do not make the least attempt to choose a good one, but actually seek out on purpose the most ignorant and incapable confessor they can find. If they hear of one who has the name of being exact in his duty, and careful in looking after the consciences of his penitents, they shun him; and if by chance they go to one who exhorts or reproves them, they do not go to him a second time. They run from one church and one confessional to the other, or they even send out spies to reconnoiter and bring them word as to how a certain priest behaves in the confessional, until at last they have found one who knows little or nothing, who listens patiently to all they have to say, gives them absolution without difficulty, and never reminds them of what they must do or avoid in their state of life; for they do not wish to hear anything about that. They want some one who will speak soft and soothing words to them, according to their own ideas, who will look on the malice of their sins as mere weakness, who will excuse their faults, and consider their un-Christian customs as harmless, and approve of them, so that they may continue in them unhindered by re-

[1] Violabant me ad populum meum propter pugillum hordei, et fragmen panis, ut interficerent animas, quæ non moriuntur, et vivificarent animas, quæ non vivunt.—Ezech. xiii. 19.

morse of conscience. (For they think that, if one such confessor, either through ignorance or human respect, or through fear of displeasing them, approves of those customs, it is all right, no matter what theologians or the holy Fathers have to say against them, according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.) In a word, they want one who will touch the wounds of the soul so gently as to leave them unhealed. They are like those of whom God has said, by the Prophet Isaias: "Children that will not hear the law of God. Who say to the seers: see not; and to them that behold: behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us pleasant things, see errors for us."[1] That is, allow us to go wrong and to be deceived; make the road to heaven broader for us than it is in reality. It is the same as if a sick man were to say to the doctor, give me an agreeable medicine, whether it is good for my health or not; prescribe sugar for me, even if it is the worst poison I could take; allow me to drink good wine, although it will only increase my fever; do you only approve of what I do, and then, in God's name, let me die. These penitents show that they have not the least desire for instruction, or to amend their vicious lives, or to be truly converted to God by sincere repentance.

Who bribe their confessors to overlook their favorite vices and give them absolution.

I do not wish to speak of those hypocrites, who are Christians only in name, and who, being addicted to certain vices, continue from one Easter to the other in their old sinful habits of injustice and usury, of retaining ill gotten goods, of remaining in the proximate occasion of sin and of impurity, and yet, in order to obey the command of the Church outwardly before men, and at the same time to have favorable judges who will always give them absolution, bribe one of those incapable confessors with presents and gifts, so as to pervert his judgment, and make him either excuse their vices, or at least say nothing about them, and give them absolution whenever they go to him. Ah! how the devil must laugh at such confessions and absolutions, for in that way two big fishes fall at the same time into his net! Blind and unhappy people, who do not wish to have a guide to lead them on the way to salvation; but still more blind and unhappy those who have a blind guide, for of a certainty they will both fall into the ditch!

Woe to such confessors

Woe to those confessors who thus dishonor their sacred office, and treat in such an unseemly manner the Blood of Jesus Christ

[1] Filii nolentes audire legem Dei. Qui dicunt videntibus: nolite videre: et aspicientibus: nolite aspicere nobis ea, quæ recta sunt; loquimini nobis placentia; videte nobis errores.—Isa. xxx. 9, 10.

and penitents.

in the sacrament of penance! If a judge, whether through malice or ignorance, pronounces an unjust sentence, he is bound in conscience to make good all the harm resulting therefrom. Hear, ye unjust judges in the tribunal of penance, what the Lord God announced to king Achab, when the latter had spared the life of king Benadad of Syria: "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man worthy of death, thy life shall be for his life."[1] The same words will be verified in you, who thus give absolution to sinners who are unworthy of it. You are worse than the tyrants who shed the blood of the martyrs of Christ, but thereby sent their souls to heaven, whereas you, by your silence, connivance, flattery or approval, and absolution, instead of saving your penitents from hell and from the yoke of the devil, only confirm them in evil and hurl them deeper down into hell; you must know that your souls will one day have to pay for the thousands of false penitents who are lost through you. And you, too, hypocritical penitents, who deliberately seek out judges of that kind, you will not escape damnation on that account; although you receive a thousand absolutions, you are not justified even once before God.

Both lose their souls. Shown by an example.

Cardinal Borromeo, a nephew of the celebrated saint of the same name, relates that there was a rich gentleman in Naples, who held a high position before the world, but was nevertheless notorious for his evil life. As he could not receive absolution from a learned and pious priest to whom he went to confession, he sought for another who would deal more leniently with him, and he found one who listened quietly to what he had to say, and who, through respect for him, gave him absolution without a word of reproof. The gentleman, bad as he was, was surprised at receiving absolution so easily, and, putting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out twenty crowns and gave them to the priest, saying, "keep that money, Father, for the journey we shall have to make together." "What journey?" asked the priest. "Well," answered the other, "we must soon go to hell, both of us; I, on account of my wicked life, and you, because you have given me absolution so readily, although you might easily have seen that I have not the least intention to amend my life." Oh, how many penitents there are nowadays, I fear, who will have to make the same unhappy journey, because they seek for absolution and receive it from imprudent confessors, without

[1] Quia dimisisti virum dignum morte de manu tua, erit anima tua pro anima ejus.—III. Kings xx. 42.

having any purpose of amendment! I repeat what I have already said: all your confessions and penances are worthless; you are not in earnest about your conversion, or else you would seek for a spiritual physician who at least knows how to cure the maladies of your souls.

There is less difficulty in disclosing one's sins to a good confessor than to a bad one.

Alas! some say, must I disclose my sins to a pious, learned, and experienced priest? I have so many fearful things to tell; what would the good man think of me? What will he think? He will think, as St. Augustine says, since his virtue makes him humble, "there is no sin which another has committed too great for me to commit, unless a special grace of God preserves me from it." His piety will make him more compassionate towards your misery, more gentle and charitable in his efforts to save you from the unhappy state of sin. For pious people are severe only towards themselves, while they are full of goodness towards others, after the example of Jesus Christ, who received sinners with the greatest love. But at the same time he will be more zealous in studying the interests of your soul by warning you of your obligations, and he will suggest means to help you to amend your life. The more pious he is, the more he will esteem you if you tell your sins honestly; and the more grievous and horrible your sins, the more he will rejoice, not, indeed, that you have been so wicked, but that he has an opportunity of saving your soul from the clutches of the devil, like the hunter who kills a large head of game, or the fisherman who lands a large fish. Ah! but he will be horrified, you think, when he hears my sins. Horrified? The more experienced the confessor is, the less will he be horrified. Is a doctor who has spent a long time in a hospital, or who has served during a war, horrified when he sees a deep wound? Not at all; he has seen so many of them that he is quite accustomed to the sight; it is nothing new to him, and does not inspire him with disgust, so that he attends to his patient without the least repugnance. Do you think that it is a new thing for an experienced confessor to hear grievous and horrible sins? Between reading and hearing, he knows of countless such sins, more, indeed, than you can imagine. And on the other hand, by a candid confession, you take away from him all fear and dread, for you make him sure that you are disposed for absolution. The greatest, nay the only trouble that a conscientious priest, who understands his business, has in the confessional, is his anxiety as to whether his penitent is well disposed or not, and has a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose

of amendment. Oh, how satisfied he is, when his penitent discloses candidly even the most terrible sins, but with a sorrowful heart, and thus shows that he really wishes to be helped!

For he knows better how to heal the maladies of the soul quickly.

Finally, you say, I am afraid to go to a learned confessor, lest he should probe the very depths of my heart, and bring my wickedness to light even in the least particulars. Certainly, he will do that, if he sees that you are not open with him, either through shame, or through ignorance. It is, in fact, his duty to do it, and you ought to be glad of it, if you are in earnest about turning to God with all your heart! That is the very reason why I have said that you should always choose as your confessor a learned, experienced, and pious priest, when you can. And for the same reason an ignorant one, who is not worth much, who never says a word in confession, makes no difficulty about absolution, and has not a clear idea of his duty in many things, is not fit to be your confessor; for if you choose him, you do not act honestly with God or with your own soul, and you only try to deceive yourself. Yes; but the other will make a sin of many a thing; he will forbid this or that custom, place all sorts of obligations on me, and will insist on my doing, omitting, avoiding, or restoring a host of things that will give me a great deal of trouble. Quite right, again! He will do all that if necessary; and he must do it, if he does not wish to lose his own soul along with yours. And that is again the reason why you should choose such a confessor, if you are determined to do true penance. From this you may see that the confessor's duty is not to try to please you, or to win your affection, but solely to save your soul from hell, and to bring it to eternal happiness, and thus to do you the greatest kindness that one man can do another. There is no doubt, it would be far easier for the confessor to hold his tongue, to let you have your way, to absolve you from all your obligations, and thus to win your esteem. What pleasure or profit can it be to him to place restrictions on you, to reprove you, and to make you uneasy by reminding you of your obligations? He certainly would never think of doing such things, if his conscience and the nature of the case did not oblige him to do them. Another, who does not know his duty, or who, through human respect, is little concerned for your soul or his own, can have it easy enough; for it does not cost him much trouble to say: sir, you need not be uneasy about that; madam, there is not much harm in that; it is not necessary in such circumstances to do away with that abuse, to avoid that house or that occasion, to

make that restitution, etc.; "I absolve thee from thy sins." There is no great art required for that. But what does he seek and gain by it? Either to please you, or to avoid trouble. Meanwhile, as to your soul's welfare, he thinks as the high-priests did when Judas brought back the thirty pieces of silver: "What is that to us? Look thou to it."[1] On the other hand, the confessor who speaks as his conscience suggests, although he may seem severe to you, shows that in reality he has your welfare at heart, and therefore you should value him all the more highly.

Therefore the sinner who wishes to do real penance should make known to him all his anxieties of conscience.

Yes, if you wish to lighten your confessor's burden, you must tell him candidly how the matter stands with you, and what are your doubts. See, Father, you should say to him, I appear before you as before Jesus Christ, my judge; I have done so-and-so; I have followed this or that custom; some say it is not lawful, and therefore I am disturbed about it; what do you think of it? What have I to do in future? I beg of you, for God's sake, to whom I wish from my heart to be converted, to tell me the truth plainly; do not flatter me; remind me of my duty; I take your soul as a pledge of the safety of mine in this business. In that way you would show that you are a true penitent and that you are earnestly resolved to be converted and to save your soul. There is no fear of my doing that, some say; I know very well that, if I were to speak in that style, I should have to give up certain customs of mine, break off that intimacy, send away that person, restore those ill-gotten goods, and avoid the occasion of sin. But I cannot do that, and therefore I will go to that other confessor; he is a good, easy man, who will not trouble me with questions and exhortations, and will give me absolution. Aha! so we have found you out at last! We have at length got to the bottom of the matter. For, generally speaking, my dear brethren, they who make choice of unlearned and inexperienced confessors are people who do not wish to amend their lives. And it is almost exclusively for them that this sermon is intended.

Conclusion and exhortation to select a good confessor.

There is one request I have to make of such sinners, and I would take it as a great favor if they would grant it. What is it? Do not, I beg of you, go to any confessor at all. Do not confess your sins, even at Easter: and, if you are still of the same mind, not even on your death-bed; it is better for you to go to hell as you are. For without such confessions as you make, you will at least not be buried so deep in hell as you would be with the guilt of them on your souls, since all your confessions are

[1] Quid ad nos? tu videris.—Matt. xxvii. 4.

sacrilegious. But if you are seriously resolved on doing penance, then I have a far greater favor to ask, which is more agreeable to me and more advantageous to you, and I ask it in the words of Tobias to his son, when he was sending him into a distant country: "Go now and seek out some faithful man to go with thee."[1] You do not know the way, and might easily go astray; look out for some one, then, to accompany you, and bring you on the right road. O sinner, I say to you, too, you have wandered far from the path that leads to heaven, and are in actual danger of eternal death; go, then, if you wish to return to God, and seek out some one who will bring you back to the right road; seek out a learned, prudent, and pious confessor, and open your conscience to him as thoroughly as you would to the almighty God, and follow his advice in all things.

And to keep to him.

But if you have found one of the kind, do not leave him for another without necessity; keep to him as long as you can. This is another point in which many faults are committed, for there are people who do not remain with the one confessor, but are constantly changing. That cannot possibly be good for them; for, in the first place, they who fall into sin through inveterate habit, or who are in the proximate occasion of sin, must keep to the one confessor or, otherwise, tell their sins again to their new confessor, so that, at least, he may have some knowledge of their conscience; or else he will not be able to help them, and their confessions will be invalid. In the second place, they who do not usually commit mortal sins cannot receive proper guidance and direction if they have not always the same guide, who knows their conscience and can prescribe wholesome remedies for them. He who has been sick of a fever and has been cured by a good doctor, if he gets sick again, will send for the same doctor. Why? Because he knows the sick man's constitution and can prescribe for him at once, which a stranger could not do. So it is also, due proportion being observed, with the maladies of the soul. Therefore, if possible, keep to the one confessor, provided he is a good one, and pray to that effect often, that God may send His good angel to lead you and to keep you from wandering off the right road to salvation.[2] I am sick in my soul, O Lord; lead me to a physician who will certainly cure me. I am blind and ignorant; grant that I may find a guide who will keep me on the right path. Give me a confessor who will oppose my evil incli-

[1] Perge nunc, et inquire tibi aliquem fidelem virum, qui eat tecum.—Tob. v. 4.
[2] Mitte angelum tuum bonum.—II. Mach. xv. 23.

nations by his instructions, reproofs, and exhortations, and who will cleanse my soul from all stain, that I may be converted to Thee with my whole heart, and after this life arrive at that happy place where nothing defiled may enter. Amen.

THIRTIETH SERMON.

ON THE MATTER OF CONFESSION.

Subject.

One must confess sins, his own sins, and all his sins.—*Preached on the sixth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

At illi tacuerunt.—Luke xiv. 4.
"But they held their peace."

Introduction.

There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent, says the Wise Man. To speak when one should be silent is not right and may be the cause of many sins; to be silent when one should speak is also wrong, and may occasion much mischief. The Pharisees, as we read in to-day's Gospel, were silent, but not with a good motive, for partly they knew not what answer to make Our Lord, and partly they did not wish to answer Him, because they were filled with hatred and envy of Him. I have hitherto, my dear brethren, explained the necessary acts that must precede confession; now I have to speak of the confession itself, as a time, not for being silent, but for speaking and candidly acknowledging—What?

Plan of Discourse.

What must one acknowledge and confess? Answer: Sins. Such will be the first part. What sins? Answer: His own. Such will be the second part. How many sins? Answer: All the grievous sins he has on his conscience. Such will be the third part. One must confess sins, his own sins, and all his sins. There you have the whole subject of this instruction.

That we may understand this and observe it, gives us Thy grace, O Holy Ghost, which we beg of thee through the merits

of Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels.

It is sins alone that one must confess.

The only necessary matter that is considered in worldly courts of justice, when proceedings are instituted against an evil-doer, is what is called the "corpus delicti," or the crime of which he is accused. If the crime cannot be proved to have been committed, there is no case against him. So also it is in the tribunal of penance; the only necessary matter concerning which an accusation can be made and judgment pronounced is a sin that has been certainly committed by the penitent. Still, there is a great difference between the two tribunals. If I wish to be acquitted by the worldly court of justice, I must set to work to prove that I have not committed the crime I am accused of, and to convict my adversary of a falsehood; or, at least, I must so defend myself, that the judge will not be able to bring the charge home to me. But if I acknowledge my guilt, I have nothing to expect but that sentence will be passed on me. "Truly," says St. Zeno, speaking of the sacrament of penance, "that is a new kind of justice, in which the accused is condemned if he excuses himself, and acquitted, if he accuses himself."[1] But if he cannot bring forward any crime of which to accuse himself he has nothing to do with this tribunal, and cannot receive absolution, nor the grace of the sacrament. The necessary matter for this sacrament is sin, and sin that has been committed after baptism; for other sins do not belong to confession and are not capable of sacramental absolution; so that a Jew or heathen who is baptized in his old age, although he may have been guilty of every sin that can be committed, yet cannot make any of those sins the subject of his confession; and Christians who have never committed a mortal sin are not obliged to go to confession; for no one is bound to confess venial sins. Thus, if one has not committed either mortal or venial sin, he cannot receive the grace of the sacrament of penance in confession, and the priest who attempts to give absolution to such a man would commit a grievous sin, as well as the man himself who seeks absolution. Therefore Mary, the most Blessed Virgin and Mother of God, who never had the least stain of sin on her soul, could not have received the sacrament of penance, and the story told about her having received absolution from St. John, in order to obtain an increase of sanctifying grace, is a mere fabrication. Therefore it is sins, and sins alone, that are the matter of confession; and

[1] Novum profecto judicii genus, in quo reus, si excusaverit crimen, damnabitur; absolvitur si fatetur.—St. Zeno, serm 2, ad neoph.

that which is not a sin, and is of no help to explain one's sins, is altogether out of place in confession.

Hence they are wrong who relate their good works in confession.

From this it follows that they act inconsistently who confess in pharisaical style. The Pharisee, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, stood before the altar in the temple, and boasted in the sight of the Lord of his good works: "I fast twice in a week; I give tithes of all that I possess."[1] Such is the way in which many penitents act nowadays; instead of confessing their sins, they confess their justices,[2] as the venerable Bede says; they tell all about their virtues, their practices of piety, the troubles they have every day, and the crosses they have to bear. When they have told one or two insignificant faults, they say, that is all I know; I hear Mass every day; I say my prayers morning and evening; I wrong no man; if I hear anything bad of another, I say to myself, what is that to me? I have my share of troubles; many things happen to annoy me every day; it is hard to bear, but I try to have patience; I do not forget that we must do something for the sake of going to heaven; if people say anything against me, I hold my tongue, etc. But what has all that to do with your confession? Those are not sins. You do not come here to wipe out whatever good you have done, but to accuse yourself sorrowfully of the evil you have done. Hear what the penitent David says to instruct you on this point: "I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord."[3] If you have no more to say about your sins, then you should make an end of your confession, and not bring into it what does not belong to it.

Who confess sins they have not committed.

The Evangelist says of the Pharisee in the Gospel: "The Pharisee standing prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers."[4] It appears that there are some who have learned from him to make their confession, for they tell what they have not done. They say, I do not remember anything in particular; I do not curse, or swear, or steal, or speak badly of others, I do no wrong to any one, and am very careful not to injure my neighbor in any way, etc. I sincerely repent of all my sins, they say at the end. What sort of a confession is that? What sins are you sorry for? You have not confessed a single one yet. Have

[1] Jejuno bis in sabbato decimas do omnium, quæ possideo.—Luke xviii. 12.
[2] Confitentur justitiam suam.
[3] Confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.—Ps. xxxi. 5.
[4] Pharisæus stans, hæc apud se orabat: Deus, gratias ago tibi, quia non sum sicut cæteri ominum, raptores, injusti, adulteri.—Luke xviii. 11.

you ever told a lie? No, Father, is the answer; it is wrong to lie. Have you done this or that? God forbid; it would be a sin to do that. And what do you come here for, then? I come to confess my sins. What? Sins you have not committed? But they are not matter for confession. You must tell your own sins, or else the priest cannot give you absolution; if you have never committed a sin in your life, you can go away; the sacrament of penance is not for such as you. In the tribunal of penance one must act towards himself as he would in a worldly court of justice against one whom he is accusing. Now, would it not be a ridiculous thing for you to say of Peter, for instance, hear, O judge, I appear against this man; I do not know anything particularly bad about him, he has not stolen or committed murder, or wronged any one. That is all I have to say; it is for you now to pronounce sentence on him. Would it not be foolish to act in that way? But not less inconsistent are you, when you accuse yourself in that way in the tribunal of penance, where you should come to declare your own sins.

Who mix up with their sins a number of things that do not belong to confession.

There are others, finally, who, although they tell their sins, yet are not satisfied with that, but bring in a lot of things that are not matter for confession at all, so that the confessor has need of all his patience to listen to a whole string of useless talk. They could, if they wished, tell their sins in a few words, but that will not do them; they must needs give the whole history of the sin, they describe the time and place in which it was committed, what was going on at the time, what was the consequence, what was the cause of it, the manner in which the thing happened; all these things have to be told with the utmost minuteness, as if they had learned it off by heart, and wished to say it as children do a lesson. For instance, a woman comes to confession (I am merely supposing a case now, from which those whom this matter concerns may learn the faults they commit in confession). A woman comes to confession and begins as follows: ah, I wish I could live in peace and quiet at home, but I cannot manage it, no matter what I do. My husband is a great trouble to me; he is in the habit of drinking too much; he knows that it is bad for him, and I tell him so, too; but all to no purpose. But, the priest says, this is no sin, did you do any thing wrong on account of it? Wait, Father, and I will tell you all about it, is the answer he gets; and she goes on in her description; last Sunday he went to the ale-house again (God forgive those who lead him astray; if it was not for them he would never think of going

there), and he came home at ten o'clock at night; I was already in bed with the children, but when I heard the knock at the door, I knew who it was. Ah, said I to myself, here you are again, you drunken beast! How are you to go to work to-morrow? And I had to get up and open the door for him.

To the confessor's great annoyance.

Wait a bit, says the priest, I will try to guess your sin; you gave way to impatience, did you not? and cursed him and called him names? No, Father, you must hear me out, and then you will know all about it. And then she begins again, until the unfortunate priest is obliged to let her have her way, or else the story would never come to an end. When she has found her cue, and taken up the thread of her story, she continues: yes, it was just as I expected; he was so far gone that he could hardly stand. I had made up my mind not to say a word to him, for I know from experience that it does not do to talk to him when he has a drop in. But, O cursed drink! the quieter I kept, the more noise he made, until he turned everything in the house upside down. Go to bed, I said to him; what will the neighbors think of you? But it was no use; he kept on flinging the chairs about the room. At last I could stand it no longer, for I am only human, after all; may so-and-so fly away with your body and soul, you drunken beast, said I; I was in such a rage that I hardly knew what I was saying, and that continued for some hours. The next morning I was sorry for having offended the almighty God, but it was too late, etc. And, says the confessor at last, did I not tell you how it would end? You might have said at once that you were in a passion for some hours, and that you cursed another while in that state; that would have been quite enough to make known your sins. All the rest was mere useless talk, that had nothing to do with confession. What do you think, my dear brethren, of that way of confessing? Is it not very stupid? Now all who in any way use superfluous words in confession can apply this to themselves. And there are many who make mistakes of the kind when confessing sins against holy purity; they imagine that it is necessary to give a whole history of the temptations and allurements that led them into sin; many, too, when accusing themselves of sins of anger and impatience, describe the crosses and trials they have to bear, and their motive in doing so appears to be to lessen the malice of their sin, although that does not properly belong to confession.

And to the great injury

Yes, you say, but if these things are not sins, then it is no harm to speak of them, as they help to explain the state of one's

of other souls.

conscience, and thus one is easier in his mind, since he is sure of having told everything. So you think it is no harm? Do you wish to know what harm it does? In the first place, you by your useless talk occasion a loss of precious time, which you could have employed far better for the salvation of your soul. In the second place, you bother your confessor, who has perhaps been already a long time in the confessional; it would require an angel to bear such talk patiently, and therefore you are to blame if he is so tired that he is unable to attend properly to the other penitents who come to him. Thirdly, during the time that you waste in unnecessary talk, three or four people might have made their confession, instead of which they have to sit there waiting, and perhaps giving way to impatience, instead of exciting themselves to contrition for their sins, while the length of time you take fills them with all kinds of suspicions about you, and makes them perhaps use very strong language against you and the priest; nay, some of them may get up and go away altogether, thus losing confession and holy Communion. Is not that harm enough? Going to confession is like going to the mill, in this respect: when people bring their corn to be ground, they pour it out on the millstone, each one in turn, and when it is ground, they go away. What would you think of one who, because he happens to be the first, spends his time in talking to the miller, and keeps the others waiting? Eh? you would say, this is no place for talk; if you do not wish to attend to your business, then let us in before you. But, he might answer, I am the first. Well, if you are the first, leave off talking and get your corn ground; we cannot wait here the whole day. So it is also with those who are going to confession. No one has anything to do there but to tell his sins and hear what the confessor has to say by way of advice or command; when that is done, he must go away and make room for others, who have just as much right as he has to confess their sins.

The devil is often the cause of such useless talk.

It has happened more than once that the devil, who seeks to make mischief out of even the holiest things, has inspired witches and sorcerers to present themselves at the confessional, when there is a great number of penitents, and to take up the priest's time by telling a lot of the most fearful sins, with no other object than to disturb the others, and to prevent them from reaping the benefit of the sacrament. On one occasion the devil appeared in the confessional in human form; the priest, who was a holy man, began at last to suspect something, and he adjured his penitent, in the name of Jesus Christ, to tell

him who he was, when the latter acknowledged that he was an evil spirit. "But," asked the priest, "why do you come to confession, since it can do you no good?" "Oh," answered the other with a laugh, "it has done me enough good to-day; for while I have been in here some of those who were waiting outside have grown impatient and have offended God anew by their murmurs, and suspicions, and curses against you and me, and thus they have taken all the good out of their sorrow for their sins. Others, again, have gone away, so that I will be able to keep them under my yoke for a while longer, and, as they are in the state of sin, they will not be able to do anything for their souls during that time. Besides that, I have wearied you, so that you will not be in a position to help other sinners who may come to you to-day. Now I have made my confession, but I do not want penance or absolution." See what you gain by your useless talk in the confessional. It is another thing for one who wants advice to state his case when the priest is not busy; but if there are many people waiting for confession he should defer asking advice, until some more suitable opportunity. Sins alone are properly the matter of confession, and therefore every one should say with David; "I will confess against myself, my injustice to the Lord." Mark those words, my dear brethren. David says, in the name of all true penitents, "against myself," and, "my injustice." Therefore he who goes to confession must confess, not only sins, but also his own sins, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

One must confess only his own sins.

The sacred tribunal of penance has this feature in contradistinction to worldly tribunals, that the penitent appears there as his own accuser, and no one else's. We have seen already, when speaking of detraction, that one may sin grievously against his neighbor, and lessen his good name before the priest, in the confessional as well as outside of it, if he makes known the name of his accomplice in a grievous sin, and the priest knows that person, or can easily know him by learning his name (unless, by making known his name to the confessor, I can prevent grievous injury; for then Christian charity or the duty of fraternal correction would oblige me to disclose the name, that the person may be helped to amend). Otherwise we must be very careful not to say anything which would tend to lessen another's reputation in the eyes of the priest.

They err in this point who confess the sins of others and injure their neighbor's character.

They err grievously in this particular who, when confessing sins of impurity, mention the name of the person who led them astray; or who, when accusing themselves of suspicions and rash judgments, say who it was who gave rise to them. They act like Adam and Eve in paradise, and throw the blame of their sins on others whom they name: "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree, and I did eat,"[1] that was the cause of my sin. That is a custom very prevalent nowadays amongst married people; the husband tells his wife's sins, and the wife, as is more frequently the case, the vices of her husband. In the same way, servants accuse their masters and mistresses, while the latter, in turn, complain of the thefts committed by their servants. There are others who complain of the faults of their brothers and sisters, and of their neighbors, with whom they cannot live in peace; and thus they make others bear the blame of their curses, of their hatred and anger, of their quarrelling and dissension. But what is the good of it all? Why do you come to confession? Is it to tell other people's sins, or your own? For what do you expect absolution? For the sins of others? Do you intend to bring an absolution to your husband or wife, to your brother or sister, or your neighbor? You should let them tell their own sins. "Let every one prove his own work," says St. Paul, "and so he shall have glory in himself only, and not in another. For every one shall bear his own burden."[2] Every one, then, must carry his own burden to the confessional. Your husband or wife, your servant or neighbor, have not commissioned you to relate their transgressions to the priest, and if you do relate them you cannot bring any grace for the guilty ones home with you; all you do is to lessen the good opinion the priest had of them.

Penitents must be careful in this respect.

Confess only your own sins, then, and not those of others. Not without reason did the penitent David beg of God to "set a watch before his mouth, and a door round about his lips."[3] Why? That, as St. Augustine says, he might confess his sins properly. David did not pray that his lips might be closed altogether, but that a door might be placed around them, which could be opened at pleasure,[4] and closed when necessary. If a man has two birds in a cage, and wishes to let one of them free,

[1] Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi.—Gen. iii. 12.

[2] Opus suum probet unusquisque, et sic in semetipso tantum gloriam habebit, et non in altero. Unusquisque enim onus suum portabit.—Gal. vi. 4, 5.

[3] Pone, Domine, custodiam ori meo, et ostium circumstantiæ labiis meis.—Ps. cxl. 3.

[4] Non dixit claustrum, sed ostium.

how does he manage so as not to lose the other as well? He opens the door carefully, and when the bird he wishes to get rid of is out, he shuts it again at once. In the same way must you act when you go to confession. You have sometimes two kinds of sin shut up in your memory, your own and your neighbor's; you must open your mouth to tell your own sins, but so carefully that, when you have told them, you shut it again at once, lest a word should escape you about the sins of your neighbor. Finally, you must open your mouth so as to declare all your sins, as we shall see in the

Third Part.

One must confess all his mortal sins, as they are in his conscience.

No sin is forgiven without the others; no sin is forgiven unless it is declared in confession, when one has the opportunity of doing so; therefore all, without exception (I am speaking now of mortal sins only, for there is no obligation of confessing venial sins), which have not yet been taken away by the sacrament of penance, must be declared in confession. This is an undoubted command of God, according to the Council of Trent, so that it requires no further proof. And, moreover, all grievous sins must be declared as they are on one's conscience; doubtful sins are to be confessed as doubtful, and certain, as certain; as well as the number of times they have been committed, as far as it is known to the penitent, and the circumstances which change the species of the sin. For instance, a rash oath is a sin against the second commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." But if, in addition, that oath injures one's neighbor, it is a sin against the seventh commandment as well, "Thou shalt not steal." If, moreover, the oath is a false one, it is also a sin against the eighth commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." Thus it is a threefold sin and must be declared with all its circumstances. The difference of the species of sins is principally to be observed in the matter of impurity; namely, what sort was the sinful act, and whether it was committed with a single or a married person, or with a relation, and in what degree of affinity or consanguinity, or with a person consecrated to God, or with a person of the opposite sex. Even in thought, the nature of the sin can change. It is one thing to have a deliberate pleasure in an impure and unlawful imagination; and another, to entertain a wilful desire, inclination, or purpose to commit an impure act; and in this latter case I must say what was the action that

formed the object of my desire, or the person with regard to whom it was formed; for all these circumstances change the nature of the sin of desire. In a word, I am bound to declare all the grievous sins I have committed and have not yet confessed, according to their gravity, and the number of times I have been guilty of them, as far as my conscience, after a diligent and reasonable examination, is aware of them. What I cannot remember without any fault of mine will be forgiven by the sacramental absolution with what I tell.

Herein faults are committed by those who confess doubtful sins as certain.

Herein many grievous faults are committed, firstly, through the pious simplicity of those who, in order to leave out nothing, make a certain of a doubtful sin, and even increase the number of their sins; thus, for instance, they cannot say for certain whether they consented to bad thoughts three or four times, and to make sure of saying the right number, as they think, they accuse themselves of having consented to the thought five times. But you thus declare too much, more than you really have on your conscience, and therefore your confession is not truthful. Or, else, if they cannot remember any particular sins, they accuse themselves in a doubtful way, through sheer ignorant fear and anxiety; perhaps I have done that, they say; perhaps I have joined in an uncharitable conversation; perhaps I have given scandal to others, etc.; or, if I have sinned in that way, if I have perhaps cursed, or said something against my neighbor, etc. What sort of a confession is that? Would you accuse a man before a worldly tribunal in this way: I accuse Paul, in case he has committed a theft, or, perhaps, he has killed a man? That would be a ridiculous accusation, and it would be impossible to pronounce any sentence in consequence of it. If you have good grounds for believing or doubting whether you have sinned or not, then your confession is not sufficient, but you must say straight out, I have sinned; I am in doubt as to whether I have consented to temptation in this or that instance. But if you have no grounds or reasonable cause to believe or to doubt, why do you say, perhaps I have sinned; perhaps I have injured my neighbor?

Or certain sins as doubtful.

There are others who do quite the contrary, and who make out of a certain number of sins, that they could easily find out, an uncertain and doubtful number. They use the word "about" with almost every sin they confess; I have done that about six times; I have cursed about four times; I have had bad thoughts about once. What do you mean by that? To say you had them

about once means that you had them twice or not at all. And as the "about" is appended to nearly every sin, how can the confessor form his judgment concerning what he hears? He must think to himself, either that man does not know the meaning of the word, or else he has not carefully examined his conscience, or he does not wish to tell the exact number of times he has sinned. That difficulty arises especially when the "about" is added to the confession of mortal sins that are accomplished in outward act, as if, for example, I were to say, I have committed impurity about three times. Grievous sins of that kind are not so easily forgotten, and one can readily remember the number of times he has been guilty of them; so that, if a person were to come to me with the "about," especially when the number of sins is small, I should say to him, you are not acting honestly with God and your conscience, nor do you wish to declare the exact number of your sins.

Or who do not give the number of their sins.

There are others who do not mention the number at all; they say simply, I have cursed; I have been drunk; I have sung impure songs; I have committed impurity; or else, I have often spoken impurely; I have often grievously injured my neighbor's character. Thus the poor priest, who, in order not to distract his penitent, has to keep silent till the end, is obliged to task his memory and to go over the whole thing again, in order to find out the exact number of times the different sins have been committed. Now, if you did not intend to declare what you knew to be the number of your sins, you have made a bad confession, and it would be better for you to have remained away, because you have thus incurred the guilt of a grievous sacrilege. But if you did intend declaring the number of your sins as well as you could, why did you not do so without waiting to be asked? Why should you compel the priest to ask you such a number of troublesome questions? The same holds good also with regard to those who, when accusing themselves in confession, say, I have had impure thoughts very often, but do not state whether they have consented to them or not, or whether they had a wilful desire or intention of doing anything against holy purity. But, you ask, if one does not know anything certain of the number of his sins; what is he to do then? My answer is that, in that case, you must declare the number of your sins as far as you have been able to discover it in a diligent examen of conscience. But if one is in the habit of sin (as is the case with those who keep up an impure intimacy), then it is, humanly

speaking, impossible to remember all the different times that sin has been committed in thought, desire, word, look, and act, so that it is enough for such a one to say that he has lived in unlawful intimacy with a person for so many months or years, that during that time nearly all his thoughts and desires had reference to the object of his passion, and that he was accustomed to commit sinful actions so often during the day, or the week. In circumstances of the kind, that is the only thing that can be done, and an experienced confessor will have no difficulty in forming a pretty exact idea of the number of sins that have been committed.

Those who tell nothing but what the priest asks them about.

There are others who err through grievous and culpable ignorance, when they rely altogether on the questions put them by their confessor; and amongst them there are some who confess nothing except what the priest extorts from them, as it were. Nay, they sometimes boast afterwards and say, the priest was rather sharp with me, but he was not able to find out everything. Unhappy souls! Which of you is deceived? The priest, or you? Even if the latter succeeded in that way in discovering all your sins, your confession is nevertheless a bad one, if you are determined not to tell your sins as they are on your conscience, without being asked. We have an example of this in Holy Scripture. Contrary to the divine command, Achan had kept out of the spoils of Jericho a costly mantle, two hundred pieces of silver, and some other things, whereupon God commanded Josue to find out the malefactor. In obedience to this order, Josue cast lots on all the tribes of Israel, and then on all the families and households, until at last he found out Achan. "My son," said he to him, "give glory to the Lord God of Israel, and confess, and tell me what thou hast done, hide it not."[1] On the discovery of the theft of which he was guilty Achan was at once stoned to death, and all his possessions were burned to ashes. But I ask here, was not that a severe punishment for such a small fault? Achan had acknowledged his sin to Josue, and had confessed it with all its circumstances. "And Achan answered Josue, and said to him: Indeed, I have sinned against the Lord the God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done."[2] "For I saw among the spoils a scarlet garment exceeding good, and two hundred sicles of silver, and a golden rule of fifty sicles; and I coveted

[1] Fili mi, da gloriam Domino Deo Israel, et confitere, atque indica mihi quid feceris; ne abscondas.—Jos. vii. 19.

[2] Respondítque Achan Josue, et dixit ei: Vere ego peccavi Domino Deo Israel, et sic et sic feci.—Ibid. 20.

them, and I took them away, and hid them in the ground in the midst of my tent, and the silver I covered with the earth that I dug up." [1] That his confession was so far candid was shown by the event, for "Josue therefore sent ministers, who, running to his tent, found all hid in the same place, together with the silver." [2] But why was not Achan forgiven? He did not deserve forgiveness, says Rupert, because he did not confess his sin until his guilt had been detected by casting the lots; if he had come of his own accord and confessed, he would probably have found grace. Christians, do not depend too much on your confessor; for even if he finds out all your sins by his questions, and you had not the intention of declaring them all candidly, that forced confession of yours will help you little to the pardon of your sins; and you are bound to repent of your evil disposition, and to confess that you did not intend declaring all your sins, unless the priest asked you about them. "Tell if thou hast anything to justify thyself," [3] says God to us by the Prophet Isaias, a passage which the Septuagint renders as follows: "declare thy iniquities first, that thou mayest be justified." [4]

Those who conceal sins through shame.

Finally, they who commit the worst fault in this particular are those who, through fear or shame, conceal a grievous sin knowingly in confession. This is a new and a terrible sin, which is the occasion of many bad confessions and unworthy Communions, especially amongst young people. Ah, wretched slaves of sin! why do you go to confession, if you do not wish to get rid of your sin? St. Sebastian once told Chromatius, the Roman prefect, that, if he wished to recover his health, he should give up all his idolatrous images. Chromatius at once gave up two hundred of them, but he did not recover. There is something wrong, said Sebastian; perhaps you have still an image hidden somewhere. You must get rid of them all, or else there is no hope for you; whereupon the prefect brought out some gold and silver idols that he kept in a box, and he was restored to health. Sinner, do you wish to regain the health of your soul, and to escape eternal death? Then you must give up all your idols, that is, you must declare all your mortal sins in confession; for, if you conceal one of them wilfully, your confession is worthless, and

[1] Vidi enim inter spolia pallium coccineum valde bonum, et ducentos siclos argenti, regulamque auream quinquaginta siclorum; et concupiscens abstuli, et abscondi in terra contra medium tabernaculi mei, argentumque fossa humo operui.—Jos. vii. 21.

[2] Misit ergo Josue ministros, qui currentes ad tabernaculum illius, repererunt cuncta abscondita in eodem loco, et argentum simul.—Ibid. 22.

[3] Narra si quid habes, ut justificeris.—Isa. xlIii. 26.

[4] Dic tu iniquitates tuas primus, ut justificeris.

there is no hope of eternal life for you, if you are determined to conceal it always. I say no more on this point at present, as I shall have another opportunity of speaking on it more at length.

Conclusion and exhortation to confess all sins.

Ah, dear Christians! I beg of you, by way of conclusion, to make an earnest resolution, like that hero who wished to encourage his soldiers to meet the enemy: "let us either conquer, or die."[1] We must either overcome our shame, and candidly declare all our grievous sins, or else we must die an eternal death. But we will not be so foolish as to choose the latter. We will rather say, with the penitent David, "I have said: I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord;" I will declare to the priest, who holds the place of God, sins, my own sins, and all my sins, even the most secret. "And Thou hast forgiven the wickedness of my sin."[2] Then, O God, according to Thy infallible promise, Thou wilt forgive my sins, that I may not die the death, but enjoy eternal life with Thee. Amen.

THIRTY-FIRST SERMON.

ON THE MANNER IN WHICH ONE SHOULD MAKE HIS CONFESSION.

Subject.

One should make his confession, 1. humbly; 2. candidly.—*Preached on the nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

At ille obmutuit.—Matt. xxii. 12.
"But he was silent."

Introduction.

But could not the poor man have implored mercy and pardon? There is no criminal so wicked or so desperate who does not ask for grace, even after sentence has been pronounced on him. "But he was silent," so that there was no mercy for him. My dear brethren, when we offend the great God by mortal sin, we lose the wedding-garment of sanctifying grace and are doomed to eternal darkness; but we have an easy and advantageous

[1] Aut vincendum aut moriendum milites est.
[2] Et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.—Ps. xxxi. 5.

means of regaining our lost cause, namely, the holy sacrament of penance. And how comes it, then, I ask, that, in spite of this, there are countless numbers of sinners, even amongst those who frequently receive this sacrament, who still remain in their unhappy state? Do you wish to know the reason of it? They act like the unhappy man in to-day's Gospel: "But he was silent." That is to say, they wish to say nothinga bout their sins, inasmuch as they defer repentance; or they do not confess what they should confess; or they do not confess in the proper manner; and therefore they do not receive pardon from their angry Judge. I have already explained what one must confess, namely, sins, his own sins, and all his sins. But how must he confess all his sins?

Plan of Discourse.

One should make his confession humbly; as we shall see in the first part. One should confess candidly; as we shall see in the second part.

Help us all to do this by Thy powerful grace, O Lord, which we ask of Thee through the intercession of Thy Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

Every one must humble himself to receive grace from God.

There is no virtue which so wins the favor of God, as humility; it is almost the only thing that God has any regard to, when He wishes to admit man into His friendship, or to preserve him in it. "The Lord is high, and looketh on the low," says the Prophet David, "and the high He knoweth afar off."[1] That is, He looks on the humble and lowly, but turns His eyes away from the proud. Humility is the measure by which He distributes His graces and favors: "And do ye all insinuate humility one to another," says St. Peter in his First Epistle, "for God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace."[2] For it is not the lofty mountains but the lowly valleys that receive the greatest share of the rains that fall from the heavens. "He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid," says the Queen of heaven of herself, she who was the greatest, and who looked on herself as the least of all creatures, and whose humility raised her to the dignity of Mother of God, and exalted her above the whole of creation; "for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."[3] The holy Fathers say that without hu-

[1] Excelsus Dominus, et humilia respicit, et alta longe cognoscit.—Ps. cxxxvii. 6.

[2] Omnes autem invicem humilitatem insinuate; quia Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam.—I. Pet. v. 5.

[3] Respexit humilitatem ancillæ suæ; ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes.—Luke i. 48.

mility not even the Blessed Virgin would have been pleasing to God. But enough of this for the present, my dear brethren; I have spoken of it more at length on a former occasion; still, one can never say too much in praise of humility, for he who is not humble of heart has no claim to the kingdom of heaven, according to the words of Our Lord Himself.

How much more the sinner, in order to obtain pardon!

This one conclusion I draw from it to day: if God requires, even from His dear friends, that they should humble themselves, in order to retain His friendship and to receive further graces from Him, with how much more reason will He not insist on His enemies humbling themselves, if they wish to regain His grace and favor after having despised them? And, indeed, the very name of penitent sinner means one who humbles himself and is filled with contrition. Who are you, then? I might ask, as the priest asked John the Baptist; who are you, when you come to confession? What is your object? You are a beggar about to implore the greatest of favors from an infinitely great and almighty Lord, who has not the least need of you, and who is at the same time exceedingly wroth with you. You are a traitor guilty of despising the divine Majesty, which you now wish to sue for pardon. You are a debtor who have not a farthing wherewith to pay, and who, having been kept in prison up to the present, are now about to beg humbly to have the debt remitted. You are a poor sinner who have seen the evil of your ways, and acknowledge that you ought by right to be led forth to execution, with a halter round your neck, and who now appear before your angry Judge to implore of Him to be merciful to you, to revoke the sentence of condemnation He has already pronounced against you, and to give you the grace of eternal life. See what a poor mortal you are! In such circumstances I leave yourself to judge with what deep interior and exterior humility you should approach the sacred tribunal.

In the confessional he appears as a criminal before his judge.

Consider the miserable state of the criminal whose case has just been tried. How downcast and humble he stands or kneels before his judge, with his eyes cast down on the ground, and his face covered with the blush of shame, waiting with trembling anxiety for the sentence of his condemnation to be pronounced! How would he act if he had but the least hope of obtaining pardon and release by humbly asking for mercy? O sinner, what are you? When you make your appearance in the confessional, you are an unhappy wretch on whom sentence of eternal death has been already passed; yet, as St. Paul says, you are now be-

fore the throne of mercy, where you can procure the revocation of that sentence, and obtain a full pardon. The priest before whom you kneel, although he is himself a poor mortal, who is as much in need of the grace and help of God as you are, is nevertheless appointed your lawful judge in the place of God. He represents and acts in the person of Jesus Christ, the Judge of the living and the dead; and he it is who says: "I absolve thee from thy sins," when you have disclosed to him, with sorrow of heart, the sins of which you are guilty. If he spoke those words in his own person, one might with justice murmur against him, and ask him the same question the Scribes and Pharisees asked Our Lord, whom they looked on as a mere mortal, when He said to the paralytic man, "Thy sins are forgiven thee."[1] What does He say, asked the Scribes and Pharisees: "Who is this who speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"[2]

Who is Christ; therefore the sinner must be most humble.

No; when you go to confession, you must not imagine that you have to deal with the priest alone. There is another confessor, or rather invisible Judge, seated beside him, Jesus Christ, whom the eternal Father has made Judge of all creatures. He it is who hears your accusation in order to absolve you from your sins; He raises His hand with the priest, and utters by the lips of the priest the words of absolution; He shares with you the infinite merits of His precious Blood and of the death He suffered for you, to satisfy for and to blot out your sins, and He it is who receives you again into His grace and friendship. Is it not right, then, that you should appear before such a Judge with the greatest modesty, humility, and lowliness, in order to beg His pardon? Although you may be a learned, rich, and great man in the eyes of the world, you are not deserving of any special consideration on that account in the confessional. You must, so to speak, strip yourself of your personality, and lay it aside before entering the sacred tribunal, in which lord and peasant, beggar and king, are on the same footing; for they then appear in no other character but that of poor sinners, doomed to eternal death, who humbly approach their Judge in order to beg for mercy; and therefore it behooves all to behave in a manner befitting such a character, that is, with the greatest inward and outward humility.

Like those penitents

Read in the holy Scriptures how the Ninivites did penance:

[1] Remittuntur tibi peccata tua.—Luke v. 20.

[2] Quis est hic, qui loquitur blasphemias? Quis potest dimittere peccata nisi solus Deus? —Ibid. 21

who received grace from God.

"They put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least."[1] The king himself, "rose up out of his throne, and cast away his robe from him, and was clothed in sackcloth, and sat in ashes."[2] There was no distinction then between the lady and her maid, the master and his servant, the king and the lowest of his scullions; for they had all alike assumed the character of penitents, that is, of men who were humbling themselves. This self-abjection and humiliation touched the compassionate heart of the good God, so that He recalled the word He had spoken, sheathed the sword He had drawn to avenge Himself, and spared the whole city. "And God saw their works, that they were turned from their evil way; and God had mercy with regard to the evil which He had said that He would do them, and He did it not."[3] It was by a similar humiliation that king Achab averted the destruction that he had been threatened with. "He rent his garments," says the holy Scripture, "and put hair-cloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and slept in sack-cloth, and walked with his head cast down."[4] Hear how God boasted almost of this to the Prophet Elias: "Hast thou not seen Achab humbled before Me? therefore, because he hath humbled himself for My sake, I will not bring the evil in his days,"[5] and while he lives, he shall not suffer punishment. A public sinner, who stands humbly at the door of the temple, and for shame and sorrow hardly dares to raise his eyes to heaven, goes down to his house justified, while the proud Pharisee, in spite of his good works, is rejected by God in the same temple. For, as Basil of Seleucia says, "I will believe in repentance when it is accompanied by humility."[6] In short, it is humility that must give life to repentance, and that, as it were, compels the heart of God to be merciful: "A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise,"[7] says the penitent David, with the assurance of being forgiven, as if he wished to say, I know, O Lord, that I do not deserve Thy mercy on account of my sins, and that all my good works are not worth being taken into consideration by

[1] Vestiti sunt saccis a majore usque ad minorem.—Jonas iii. 5.

[2] Surrexit de solio suo, et abjecit vestimentum suum a se, et indutus est sacco, et sedit in cinere.—Ibid. 6.

[3] Et vidit Deus opera eorum, quia conversi sunt de via sua mala, et misertus est Deus super malitiam, quam locutus fuerat ut faceret eis, et non fecit.—Ibid. 10.

[4] Scidit vestimenta sua, et operuit cilicio carnem suam, jejunavitque et dormivit in sacco, et ambulavit demisso capite.—III. Kings xxi. 27.

[5] Nonne vidisti humiliatum Achab coram me? Quia igitur humiliatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus.—Ibid. 29.

[6] Pœnitentiæ tunc creditur, quando cum humilitate conjuncta est.

[7] Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies.—Ps. l. 19.

Thee; yet there is one thing that gives me courage, and leads me to hope that Thou wilt receive me into Thy favor, and that is, that Thou canst not despise a humbled heart.

In what this humility must consist.

Therefore, O sinner, no matter how great you are before the world, you must be humble when you appear in the confessional; humble interiorly in your heart, in which you acknowledge that you are a criminal worthy of hell fire and undeserving of pardon, which, however, you now hope to receive from the mercy of God; humble in speech and in the confession of your sins, so that you may declare them with a holy fear, and, as far as possible, with modest and respectful words; humble in your outward behavior, with downcast eyes, on bended knees, and with folded hands, to show that you are in presence of the Judge of the living and the dead, who will pronounce sentence on you; humble in the attitude of your body, so that all who see you may know that you are approaching as a poor sinner, in the hope of moving the God whom you have offended to mercy and forgiveness. For then I believe in penance, "when it is accompanied with humility."

It is wanting to those who come to confession extravagantly dressed.

Christians, do we always bring that inward and outward humility to the sacred tribunal? Do they bring it, who come to confession dressed in the height of the fashion, and in a vain, not to say scandalous style, and who, when they have with difficulty, owing to their extravagant dress, entered the confessional, actually give occasion of sin to others, while they are accusing themselves of their own sins? If a person who knows nothing of our holy sacraments were to see this and ask, what are those people doing in there? and I were to tell him that they are poor sinners, who are presenting themselves before God's tribunal in the hope of escaping an eternal fire, which they acknowledge they have deserved, and of obtaining pardon, if they ask for it with contrite and humbled heart, what would he think? What, he would say, are those people sinners? Are they beggars? They do not look like it, certainly. I should rather think that this was a public dancing place, or a stage on which they appear to let themselves be admired, and to attract the attention of others. And he would have reason to arrive at such a conclusion. That is the opinion of St. Ambrose, as we read in his treatise on penance. "There," he complains, "you may see women with pearls and precious stones in their ears," with bared neck and shoulders, tricked out with gold and silver, with their hair curled, etc., "who should be deploring their unhappy fate, in having

lost the precious pearl of divine grace,"[1] who ought to weep at having lost the wedding-garment of their souls, and at being stripped of all merits and supernatural virtues.

Who, while waiting for their turn, look around, talk, and laugh.

And if he were to ask further, who are they who, while awaiting their turn to enter the confessional, are looking around, speaking to those who come in and go out, and laughing, and talking with each other? They too, I would say to him, are poor sinners who are waiting until they can appear before their Judge, in order to accuse themselves, and to ask humbly for forgiveness. Eh, he would say, but that is a strange way for them to act! It seems that they do not care much for their angry Judge, and it matters little to them whether they are forgiven or not. And so it is in reality. All these people show by their indecent behavior that they have not a clear idea of the malice of their sins, of the unhappy state of their souls, and of the danger of eternal death in which they are; at all events, they do not show any of that humility that befits a repenting sinner.

They do not realize the malice of their sins. Shown by a simile.

Imagine, my dear brethren, that you see a man coming along the street, with a heavy burden on his head; he is quite cheerful and gay, he turns his head round in every direction, and looks at the houses on either side as he passes. What would you think of him? What would you imagine he was carrying? Perhaps a load of lead or iron? But if that were the case, he would not take it so easily; he would be bent under his burden, and sweat under the weight of it. You would necessarily come to the conclusion that his burden consists of feathers, or some very light substance, or that it is nothing but a bag inflated with air, that he is carrying; or, else, you would say that man is very strong, and does not feel the weight of his load. Sinner, when you come to confession, and have even one mortal sin on your soul, do you know what you have to bear? A burden that is of itself capable of dragging you down to the depths of hell; a burden under which David groaned and sighed: "My iniquities are gone over my head; and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end; I walked sorrowful all the day long. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart."[2] A burden that the heavens could not tolerate in the rebel angels, who

[1] Videre est fœminas margaritis onerare aures . . . quæ seipsas flere debebant quod margaritam, quæ de coelo est, perdiderint.—St. Ambr., l. 2 de poenit.

[2] Iniquitates meæ supergressæ sunt caput meum, et sicut onus grave gravatæ sunt super me. Miser factus sum et curvatus sum usque in finem; tota die contristatus ingrediebar. Afflictus sum et humiliatus sum nimis; rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei.—Ps. xxxvii. 5, 7, 9.

had sinned against their Creator by a single thought. A burden that engulfed Pharao and his host in the Red Sea. A burden that has sunk thousands of souls into hell. And do you, who have to bear that heavy burden, laugh and sing under the weight of it? Do you look about you, and show every sign of pride in your manner, when you come to lay it aside in confession? It is evident that you do not feel the weight of it; that you look on it as a matter of trivial importance to have offended God, for if you knew what it is to have made God your enemy, what an endless good you have lost, and what a terrible punishment you have incurred, you would almost die of grief and sorrow, and, if possible, you would hide under the earth for very shame, or, at least, you would approach the sacred tribunal far more humbly, and cast yourself at the feet of your heavenly Judge, like a poor criminal, who is about to be led forth to execution, after having sentence passed on him.

They are put to shame by holy souls.

Ah, holy souls, who come to confession with nothing but human weaknesses and imperfections to confess, how modest and humble you are under your burden, light though it is. St. Aloysius, of our Society, had taken, when he was a child, a little powder out of the pocket of a soldier, and on another occasion he heard and repeated some indecent words, the meaning of which he did not understand. When he was telling those supposed transgressions of his in confession he threw himself on the ground before the priest, as if he were the greatest sinner in the world, and his sorrow was so great that he fainted. Pepin, the prime minister of Dagobert, king of France, and a man of holy and blameless life, always went barefooted to confession, in order to show the world that he looked on himself as a poor sinner who was about to implore mercy from his Judge. And we, who have often such a load of grievous sins to carry, come to confession with as much unconcern, and with such vanity in our dress and manner, as if we were going to a comedy, or to a party of pleasure. Ah, we do not know what we are, true humility is wanting to our repentance, and it is greatly to be feared that it is therefore no true repentance at all.

Other penitents, too, are wanting in humility.

What shall I say of those penitents who tell their manifold and grievous sins as coolly and indifferently as if they were telling the latest news, without the least sign of shame, and who, when their confessor tries to persuade them of the malice of their sins, in order to excite them to repentance, or, with the best intentions towards them, reminds them of their duties, act-

ually dispute and argue with him, as if they were not accusing themselves, but were rather judges having full power to decide in their own cause; who complain of the penance enjoined on them, when it is not according to their fancy, and demand an easier one; and who, when they have been reminded of their duty, and the priest must remind them of it to fulfil his obligation, grumble against him and say that he does not know how to treat respectable people, or that he has acted towards them as if they were ignorant boors, etc. But how do you expect your confessor to treat you? As a great lord, or a noble lady? No, for you do not appear in that character in the confessional; if you did so, you would make a great mistake. You are simply a poor sinner deserving of hell, and you come before your Judge in order to implore His forgiveness, and to obtain His grace and mercy; that is what you are, and not a whit more, and you must show in your words and manners that you acknowledge yourself as such. One should confess his sins with humility, and consequently with candor, as we shall see in the

Second Part.

They are not candid who try to put the blame of their sins on others.

Candor in confession consists in acknowledging one's faults and their malice clearly and plainly, without trying to excuse, palliate, lessen, or conceal them, so that the priest can easily understand them, and nothing will be hidden from him. It is a very common fault for people, who otherwise wish to declare all their sins, to endeavor to tell them in such a way as to lessen the shamefulness and deformity of them, so that they themselves may not feel so much shame in acknowledging themselves guilty; and to that end they make every effort to throw the blame of their sins off their own shoulders. Thus they put forth as an excuse the weakness of their nature, the sudden surprise of passion, the violence of temptation, which they were unable to overcome under the circumstances, the allurements of an occasion into which they came without intending it, the grievousness of the insult offered them, the high position of the person to please whom they did something unlawful. They put forward pretexts of the kind with no other intention but that of lessening the wickedness and the shamefulness of their impurity, drunkenness, vindictiveness, injustice, or anger, so that the confessor may have pity on them, and they may have no reason to feel shame in telling him their sins.

Like king Saul.

King Saul made a confession of that kind when he once

failed to do as he was commanded by God. He acknowledged his sin to the Prophet Samuel: "I have sinned, because I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words;" but he immediately added the excuse, "Fearing the people and obeying their voice."[1] His meaning was: I have certainly done wrong, but my fault is deserving of pardon, as it was caused by fear; I was afraid of a rebellion amongst the people, and had to give way to them. If Saul had confessed his fault with sorrow of heart, and without trying to excuse it, why should not his penitent confession, "I have sinned," have found grace with God, as well as a similar confession that David made? But Saul was not candid; he tried to make himself appear more innocent than he really was, and therefore his repentance and confession were rejected by the Lord. "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord," continued Samuel, "the Lord hath rejected thee from being king over Israel."[2] In this sacramental tribunal, my dear brethren, one must not act the part of his own advocate, but honestly confess his sins, and attribute all the malice of them to himself, as David did, when he saw the angel destroying his people: "It is I that have sinned; I have done wickedly;"[3] it is to me alone that the blame of that sin is to be attributed. In the same way every penitent should say, it is I who have sinned. I could and should have resisted that treacherous companion, that assault of passion, that strong temptation, that diabolical inspiration. The whole malice of the sin lies in my own will; "through my fault, through my most grievous fault;" I acknowledge that I am a sinner, and as such I now wish to do penance.

Those who say that the sin was committed against their will.

There are others who put forward still lamer excuses. Say that a person of the opposite sex has allowed some liberties to be taken with her; ah, she says, so and so was the case, but I had no pleasure in it! What? Is that the way to confess your sins candidly? How is it possible that it happened against your will, and that you had no pleasure in it, since you permitted it, or were silent, or did not try to prevent it, or, if you offered a pretended resistance, were glad at heart that it was unsuccessful? There is no meaning in what you say. If a thief takes away a piece of cloth in your presence from a shop of which you

[1] Peccavi, quia prævaricatus sum sermonem Domini, et verba tua, timens populum, et obediens voci eorum.—I. Kings xv. 24.

[2] Quia projecisti sermonem Domini, et projecit te Dominus, ne sis rex super Israel.—Ibid. 26.

[3] Ego sum qui peccavi; ego inique egi.—II. Kings xxiv. 17.

have the charge, and you say nothing about it, or after a few words allow the thief to depart with his booty, what would your employer say to that? Would he be satisfied with your excuse: sir, the cloth was stolen, but I had no pleasure in it; it was taken against my will; I told the thief not to take it, but he did not heed me, and I could not prevent him, as he was stronger than I? "But," your master would cry out in just anger, "is that the way you do my will, unfaithful servant that you are? Could you not at least have cried out at the top of your voice that there were thieves in the house? You have not done so, and therefore you are to be blamed for the theft and must make good the loss." In the same way, if one is tempted to anything unlawful, he or she must resist to the last drop of blood, if necessary, and call on the neighbors for help, or suffer death even, rather than do anything against the law of God. St. Bernard, being once attacked by an unchaste woman, and having no other means of defence, began to shout at the top of his voice, "thieves! thieves!" St. Thomas, being placed in similar circumstances, took a firebrand from the hearth and drove away with it the person who was tempting him. The holy youth Nicaetas, who was tied hand and foot, and had no other way to defend his purity, bit off his tongue and spat it with his blood in the face of the shameless woman who tried to make him fall into sin. There are means enough at hand to resist the most violent temptations, if one only wishes to make use of them. If you have not done so, as your conscience testifies against you, you cannot say with truth that the thing happened against your will, so that your confession is a bad one, if you try to excuse your sin by that false pretext.

Who try to hide their sins in all kinds of ways.

There are many others who go more cleverly to work, apparently, though with more malice, to palliate the wickedness of their sins; they say part of them in a clear voice, while they mutter the rest between their teeth, so that the confessor cannot well understand what they are saying; or else they use equivocating expressions, that leave the priest unable to form a positive judgment of their case; and then they flatter themselves that they have told their sins properly, and that it is not their fault if the confessor has not understood what they said, although they acted with the express intention of leading him into error about their sins. For instance, to explain the matter by a simile, a person says, I have stolen. What did you steal, asks the priest. I have stolen a purse. And was it of much value?

No, it was an old leathern purse, that was not worth anything. Oh! thinks the confessor, then it was a small theft. And the penitent goes away. But wait a bit; was there anything in the purse? Yes, there were ten ducats in it. What did you do with them? I took them, too! Oh! that is another thing altogether. Mark, my dear brethren, how, instead of saying that he stole the money, he says merely that he took the purse.

There are many who confess their sins in the same way. A vain and worldly woman accuses herself as follows: I have sometimes given way to vanity and curiosity. What do you mean by that? You are acknowledging the theft of the purse, but you say nothing about the money; you are trying to hide dangerous looks and wanton gestures under the name of vanity and curiosity. Those impure thoughts and desires which you occasion in yourself and others by your unwarranted freedom in company, are they merely sins of curiosity? The jealousy and secret rage of your husband, who notices your conduct, is that, too, mere curiosity? And what do you call vanity? The profanation of the house of God, in which you appear dressed in a scandalous style, that might easily excite others to sin, is that vanity? The desire and secret longing for an unlawful affection on the part of those who see you thus tricked out, the bad example you thus give, are these and all the sins that follow from them to be classed also as mere curiosity and vanity? No; you are not candid in confession. I have sought sensual pleasure, says another; I have laughed and amused myself in certain company, and have spoken of idle, vain, and useless things. And is that all? That is the purse; now, where is the money? What do you mean by sensual pleasure? You can seek that in eating, drinking, sleeping, and so on. If one looks at it closely, he will find it to have been carnal pleasure, and that is quite another sort of thing. And what kind of jokes and amusement had you in that company? What was your useless conversation about? Were you talking against holy purity, or against Christian charity? You must make a clean breast of the whole matter, or else your confession is not a good one. I have spoken ill of my neighbor, say others; I have been angry; I have spent my time in idleness, etc. Yes, but there is something else behind it, which you must out with at once. Did you not speak ill of your neighbor through hatred and vindictiveness? did you lessen his good name? was what you said true or false? did you speak in presence of one, or of several? You were

There are many who do that.

angry. Now that is the purse; where is the money? What did you do through anger? What was the consequence of your idleness? Did you neglect your household duties or the care of your children? All these things have to be declared in confession, if the confession is to be a good one, and valid in the sight of God.

All these betray and condemn themselves.

Ah, with reason does the Prophet complain, that "iniquity hath lied to itself."[1] We wish to confess our sins, but in such a way as not to be understood. Christians, what is the use of that? What do we gain by it? Whom do we deceive? God? the priest? or ourselves? They who try to hide their wickedness in that way will fare like the wife of king Jeroboam, of whom we read in the Third Book of Kings. She had disguised herself so as not to be recognized by the Prophet Achias, whom she wished to consult; but the Prophet, enlightened by God, saw through the disguise, and said to her as soon as she opened the door: "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why dost thou feign thyself to be another?"[2] I know who thou art; "but I am sent to thee with heavy tidings."[3] Your son will die; you and your husband will perish miserably, and not one of your whole race will be left: "I will sweep away the remnant of the house of Jeroboam, as dung is swept away, till all be clean. Them that shall die of Jeroboam in the city, the dogs shall eat; and them that shall die in the field, the birds of the air shall devour."[4] Sinner, when you wish to confess your sins you go to the servant of God. If your confession is not candid; if you try to disguise yourself so as to appear otherwise than you are in conscience; if you seek excuses to palliate your sins, or endeavor to lessen the guilt of them by equivocating expressions, or do not declare them fully, what will your confession profit you? The priest, who cannot see your heart, will sometimes, if he does not know how to find out the truth, give you absolution; but the almighty God, whom the priest represents, will call out to your conscience: "why dost thou feign thyself to be another?" Why do you pretend to be what you are not? But I know you thoroughly, and therefore I now announce eternal death to you; instead of saying, "I absolve thee," I say "I condemn

[1] Mentita est iniquitas sibi.—Ps. xxvi. 12.

[2] Ingredere, uxor Jeroboam; quare aliam te esse simulas?—III. Kings xiv. 6.

[3] Ego autem missus sum ad te dúrus nuncius.—Ibid.

[4] Mundabo reliquias domus Jeroboam, sicut mundari solet fimus usque ad purum. Qui mortui fuerint de Jeroboam in civitate, comedent eos canes; qui autem mortui fuerint in agro, vorabunt eos aves cœli.—Ibid. 10, 11.

thee." Ah, unhappy sinner, your God condemns you! What good will it be to you, then, if a mere mortal, whom you can easily deceive, pronounces the words of absolution over you? If God condemns you, who can absolve you? Do you, then, wish to make of the confessional, which is a throne of grace that Jesus Christ has set up in order to cleanse your soul from the filth of sin, a stern judgment-seat, in which, by your hypocritical confession, you provoke against yourself a sentence of eternal damnation?

Conclusion and resolution to confess our sins humbly and candidly.

Oh, no, my God, far be that from me! No matter what I do to hide the malice of my sins, Thou knowest what I am, and what I have done. Therefore I will make my confession as if, which is in reality the case, I were before Thy very eyes. I will acknowledge my sins with all interior and exterior humility, as is becoming; I will acknowledge them as a poor criminal who is deserving of eternal death, and who implores mercy. I will confess them honestly and candidly, with all their circumstances, as far as I know I am guilty of them; and then I can confidently expect Thy grace and the pardon of my sins, although I am undeserving of them, so that hereafter I may find written in Thy great account book the words which the priest in Thy place pronounces over me, "I absolve thee from thy sins;" they are all blotted out; enter into the joy of thy Lord amongst the number of true penitents. Amen.

THIRTY-SECOND SERMON.

ON CONCEALING SINS IN CONFESSION THROUGH SHAME.

Subject.

How foolish to conceal a sin in confession through shame; because thereby one makes himself still more ashamed, 1. in this life; and 2. in the next.—*Preached on the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Tenuit manum ejus, et surrexit puella.—Matt. ix. 25.
"He took her by the hand, and the maid arose."

Introduction.

So easy it is for the almighty God to restore the dead to life, that He need only touch the hand of the dead person, and immediately life returns. "He took her by the hand, and the maid arose." It is just as easy, my dear brethren, for Him to restore life to the soul that is dead in sin, and to bring back to it the grace it has lost; all that is necessary is for the priest, in the place of God, to raise his hand and pronounce the words of absolution, and at once the sinner, who was dead before, lives in the Lord, provided he puts no obstacle to the effects of the sacrament. But how often does it not happen that the priest raises his hand and gives absolution, while the sinner remains as he was, spiritually dead, because he was wanting in due examination of conscience, or in true sorrow, or in a firm purpose of amendment, or in the candid confession of all his sins. It is my intention to speak again to-day of this latter class of penitents, namely of those who do not candidly declare their sins in confession, inasmuch as they deliberately conceal a grievous sin, or do not confess it fully, through fear or shame. Deplorable, indeed, is the blindness of those souls; for what greater folly than theirs could be imagined? This I shall now prove at length, in order to deter all from committing such a grievous sin, as to conceal a sin in confession, and to encourage those who perhaps have such a sin already on their consciences to declare it candidly and so get rid of it.

Plan of Discourse.

There is nothing more foolish than to allow oneself to be prevented by shame from declaring all one's sins in confession. Why? Because thereby one makes himself still more ashamed in this life. The first and longer part. And in the next life, too. The second part. Sinners, let us honestly confess all our sins; such shall be the conclusion.

Help us thereto by Thy grace, O Almighty God, which we beg of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

It is not a disgraceful, but a praiseworthy thing, to declare one's sins in confession.

Not to lose time, tell me, O sinner, why you are ashamed to confess your sins, and to acknowledge them all candidly? One ought to be ashamed, not of an honorable, but of a disgraceful act. But you say, that is just where the difficulty lies; for it is certainly a disgraceful thing that brings a blush into a man's face, and makes him tremble with anguish. Now, in what does this shame consist? Is it in your confessing your sins? Then

it is a shame to tell the truth when one is obliged to tell it; and the God of all holiness and justice has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to do a disgraceful thing, for it is He who obliges you to declare all your mortal sins in confession. And therefore one can receive supernatural grace, increase his merit, and gain heaven, by doing a disgraceful and, consequently, an unworthy thing. And, moreover, it is disgraceful to seek a remedy in the precious Blood of Jesus to heal the mortal wounds of your soul; disgraceful to cover and take away your own deformity and misery; disgraceful to free yourself from the slavery of the devil, and to become a friend of God; disgraceful to give joy to the angels in heaven and honor and glory to God. Did David, and Magdalene, and Paul, the great apostle of the gentiles, and Augustine, disgrace themselves by confessing their sins? Are they not honored by every one, precisely on account of that confession, which some of them actually wrote and published to the world? Therefore it is not disgraceful but honorable to confess one's sins. Truly, says St. John Chrysostom, "it is not a dishonorable thing, but rather an act of justice and virtue to acknowledge your sins."[1] It is an act of justice by which you restore to God and your soul what you have stolen from them; and an act of virtue, because it implies humility and the overcoming of yourself; and so it is a holy confusion which brings you the greatest honor. Such is the testimony that God Himself gives of it by the wise Ecclesiasticus: "There is a shame that bringeth glory and grace."[2]

It is only in committing sin that shame consists.

In what, then, does the disgrace consist of which you are so much ashamed in confession? In my having committed such a horrible sin, you say. So, then, you acknowledge that shame comes from sin? And you are quite right, too. But there is no shame in declaring the sin in confession. Sin is the only thing that has nothing honorable about it; it alone has brought the greatest disgrace on the soul, and has made it like the hideous demons, hateful to God and an abomination to the angels and to all creatures. If all men were to vilify and despise you on account of it, could you with justice complain? What right have you to an honorable name, after having acted so disgracefully towards your God? You deserve nothing but eternal disgrace amongst the demons in hell. You have reason enough to be ashamed of committing sin; and you should have felt that shame

[1] Non est confusio accusare tua peccata, sed est justitia et virtus.

[2] Est confusio adducens gloriam et gratiam.—Eccius. iv. 25.

before now. When you made up your mind to commit that grievous sin, which you now conceal from your confessor, where was your fear, where your shame, that now prevents you from getting rid of that sin? You did not hesitate to defile your soul, even in the presence of others; perhaps you have even boasted of your crime, and shown complacency at it; and now you are ashamed to free yourself from it? It is, says St. John Chrysostom, a trick of the devil to deprive of shame him who is about to commit sin, and to give it back to him when he is about to confess and to do penance. And the restitution is more cruel than the theft. It is as if I were to snatch out of the soldier's hand the sword with which he has to defend himself against his enemy, and to restore it to him when he is about to take away his own life. "O miserable mortal!" says St. John Chrysostom, "when you were becoming a sinner, you were not ashamed; but now, when you can become just and holy, you are ashamed."[1] What lamentable blindness and folly!

He who conceals his sins only adds to his shame.

You have just reason to be ashamed of remaining any longer in the miserable and disgraceful state of sin; but when you conceal your guilt in confession, you prefer to be disgraced before God and your own conscience, rather than to face an imaginary shame, which is in reality honorable, just, and praiseworthy, and which will restore you your honor in the sight of God. But what do I say about your being disgraced before God? For, in fact, you dishonor and disgrace yourself far more than before by your shameful reticence in confession, by which you commit another most horrible and sacrilegious crime, profaning the holy sacrament of penance and making the absolution you receive invalid, as you yourself must acknowledge. See now how great are your folly and stupidity, for, through fear of an imaginary evil, you rush headlong into a real misfortune. By wishing to avoid a holy shame, you bring greater disgrace on yourself, at the very time when you are trying to get rid of your shame by a sacrilegious confession.

For he must confess it, some time or other if he wishes to avoid eternal damnation.

Nor is that all; for you are bringing greater shame on yourself for the future time, which is still more foolish of you. Tell me, what is it that you are now afraid of in confession? What is the great difficulty that unnerves you? Is it not the obligation of confessing that sin, which lies so heavily on your heart, and the very name of which is enough to make you shudder?

[1] O te miserum! cum effectus es peccator, non erubescebas; quando justus efficeris, te primum pudet.

You are afraid to mention that sin, and if you could, you would conceal it even from your own conscience. Will you keep it always hidden in your bosom? Will you never ease your mind of it? Are you determined never to confess it? If so, then woe to you, unhappy man, for you are lost forever! Eternal damnation is your fate, nor can I address you in any milder language. For, as St. Augustine says; "you will be damned on account of your silence, when you might have been saved by confessing your sin." [1] You do not imagine, I suppose, that the sin you conceal will be taken away by an invalid absolution? For you must know that neither that nor any other one is forgiven, since one mortal sin cannot be forgiven without the other, and none can be forgiven unless it is candidly declared in confession when one remembers it and has the opportunity of receiving the sacrament. He who is suffering from an abscess must get rid of the matter it contains, or he will die. Do you think that the Almighty will publish a new Gospel to please you, or that He will open a special door to let you into heaven? But you know that such expectations would be fruitless, and that there is no alternative for you but confession, or, in case you have not the opportunity of confession, perfect contrition, or else hell for all eternity. You may lead a most holy life in other respects, but if you keep that one sin locked up in your conscience, and are determined never to confess it candidly, you will be lost forever. It is not a matter in which you can expect a dispensation.

Foreshadowed in Holy Scripture.

We find this truth foreshadowed in the holy Scripture, especially in two men, one of whom was raised from death to life, while the other was condemned to death. The first is Lazarus; the second, that unhappy guest who appeared without a wedding-garment. The former was already mouldering away in his grave; the latter was seated at the festive board, enjoying himself. The former was bound, and Christ ordered him to be loosed; the latter was at liberty, and the king commanded him to be bound hand and foot. The former was buried, and Christ called to him to come forth from his tomb; the latter was still alive when the king commanded his servants to bury him. The former was decaying in darkness, and Christ called him forth to the light: "Lazarus come forth." [2] The latter was enjoying the full light of day, and the king commanded him to be thrust

[1] Tacitus damnaberis, qui poteras liberari confessus.

[2] Lazare, veni foras.—John xi. 43.

forth into darkness: "Cast him into the exterior darkness."[1] Both, my dear brethren, are figures of the sinner; the former of the true penitent, who is raised by Jesus Christ from spiritual death to life; the latter of the impenitent sinner, who dies while in the state of sin. Let us first consider the example of Lazarus; and here I must wonder that Our Lord called to him to come forth out of the grave, and to show himself publicly, although he was bound hand and foot with winding-bands, and then commanded His disciples to loose him. How, I must ask, could he come out of the grave, before being loosed? Should not his bands have first been untied, so that he might be able to move? But no; Our Lord wished Lazarus to come forth out of the grave tied as he was, that the Apostles might afterwards loose him. What was the reason of that? The following is the beautiful explanation of it given by St. Gregory: "Lazarus was told to come forth, as if to show that the same words might be used to all who are dead in the state of sin. Why do you hide your guilt within your conscience? Come forth, you are hidden within yourself, by not declaring your sin. Let the dead man then come forth; that is, let the sinner confess his guilt, and the Apostles loose him as he comes forth; for the pastors of the Church are bound to free from due punishment him who is not ashamed to confess what he has done."[2] Lazarus had good reason to be ashamed to come forth out of his grave as he was, clad in his grave-clothes and beginning to corrupt; but, nevertheless, he had to appear, if he wished to regain life and freedom. In the same way the sinner is ashamed to disclose to the priest the abominations of his life; but he must do so, if he wishes to recover the grace he has lost, and with it the life of his soul; "let the dead man, then, come forth, that is, let the sinner confess his guilt."

This it was in which the unhappy guest was wanting, and therefore he was cast out of the banquet-hall into prison. The king asked him: "How camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding-garment?"[3] And what answer did the man make him? None at all. "But he was silent."[4] Shame prevented him from

[1] Mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.—Matt. xxii. 13.

[2] Lazaro ergo dicitur: veni foras; ac si aperte cuilibet mortuo in culpa diceretur; cur reatum tuum intra conscientiam abscondis? foras jam per confessionem egredere, qui apud te interius per negationem lates. Veniat itaque foras mortuus, id est, culpam confiteatur peccator, venientem ergo foras solvant discipuli, ut pastores Ecclesiæ ei pœnam debeant amovere, quam meruit, qui non erubuit confiteri quod fecit.—St. Greg. hom. 26 in Evang.

[3] Quomodo huc intrasti, non habens vestem nuptialem.—Matt. xxii. 12.

[4] At ille obmutuit.—Ibid.

answering. He might have alleged his poverty, saying that he had not money wherewith to buy costly clothing; but he was ashamed and did not like to make known his poverty. He could have said that he was not aware that the banquet to which he was invited was such a solemn one, or, else, that he had not time to have proper clothing made; but he was silent, and was ashamed to make known his ignorance and carelessness. At the very feast he might have acknowledged his fault and have implored the king's pardon; but no, he was silent. And therefore, as he refused to confess, he was condemned: "Then the king said to the waiters: bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness."[1] As Galfridus remarks on this passage, the king ordered him to be bound, not when he entered the banquet-hall, nor when he appeared beforethe guests unsuitably clad, but when he was addressed by the king; "then, namely, when he kept silent after having been admonished, and when, having been asked, he refused to answer."[2] The holy Fathers tell us that the king represents Jesus Christ, the same merciful Saviour who opens heaven to robbers and murderers, to the unchaste and adulterers, to thieves and drunkards, to blasphemers and the sacrilegious, when they repent; but who refuses to pardon those sinners who conceal and do not properly declare their sins in confession.

Shown by examples.

There is a well-known instance recorded by St. Antoninus of a widow who in her youth had committed a sin against holy purity, which she always concealed in confession through shame; but since it troubled her conscience very much, she tried to expiate it by fasting and chastising herself in various ways, often scourging herself until the blood flowed; nay, in order to atone all the better for her sin, she entered a very strict order, in which, owing to the good example she gave, she was soon elected to the dignity of abbess. Still, she could never overcome herself sufficiently to confess the sin she had so long concealed. At last she died, to the great sorrow of her Sisters, who revered her as a saint, and who expected to see her sanctity proved by miracles. And, in fact, they did see a miracle, but not such a one as they expected; for the deceased abbess appeared to them, surrounded by flames and crying out with a loud voice: "I am your former abbess, and am now in hell, because I wilfully concealed a mortal sin in confession; cast my body out on the dung-hill, as it is not worthy of

[1] Tunc dixit rex ministris: ligatis manibus et pedibus ejus, mittite eum in tenebras exteriores.—Matt. xxii. 13.

[2] Tunc videlicet, postquam admonitus siluit, interrogatus obmutuit, et noluit confiteri.

Christian burial, since the soul that occupied it is accursed by God."

A nearly similar instance is related by our Father Francis Rodriguez of the daughter of Hubert, regent of England, which occurred at a time when the Catholic faith was still flourishing in that country. She was so beautiful that she excited the admiration of every one, and was asked in marriage by many great princes; but through love of holy virginity, which she had vowed to Jesus Christ, she refused all their offers, and, having been allotted a separate dwelling by her father, spent her time with some other pious maidens, in solitude. She founded churches and convents, waited on the sick in the hospitals, and practised many mortifications. Having led a holy life for some time, she died. The night after, a noble lady, who had been the princess's preceptress, wished to know how high she was in heaven, and while engaged in prayer, was surprised to see the door suddenly opened, and a female form surrounded by demons enter the room. "Fear not," said the apparition, "I am the daughter of Hubert, and am now in hell." The lady, more dead than alive, cried out: "My God, is it possible? Who can hope for salvation, if such a holy person loses her soul?" "Hear me," said the unfortunate princess; "not God, but I myself, am to blame for the loss of my soul. You know that a certain page used to read for me, when I was too tired to read myself; on one occasion, when we were alone, I allowed myself to be overcome by an impure passion for him, and sinned with him. I accused myself of it in confession, but the confessor imprudently said to me: 'but, your highness, how could you do such a thing? I can hardly believe it; it must have been imagination.' I then got ashamed, and said that I had merely dreamed it; and thus I made a bad confession, and although God warned me even in my last illness, I could never summon up courage to confess my sin. I died impenitent and am now in hell." You see, my dear brethren, how no amount of good works will help the sinner, if he wilfully conceals even one mortal sin in confession.

If he intends confessing it hereafter, he will have more sins and more grievous ones to confess

Now, sinner, to continue the argument we have commenced, is it your intention never to confess that sin? Alas, if it is, you will fare like those two unfortunates; there is not the least doubt of it! But I trust you will not allow matters to go so far, and that, some time or other, you will tell that sin properly in confession. Very good; but will you then feel less ashamed than now? Will that sin appear less horrible to your confessor, than

it now would? If you consider the matter aright, you must acknowledge that you will then have far more reason to be ashamed than you now have; for, in addition to confessing the sin you have so long concealed, you must also tell every one of the grievous sins you committed on account of it. The sin you conceal is like a seed dropped in your heart, as God says by the Prophet Osee: "You have ploughed wickedness;"[1] or, as the Septuagint has it, "you have concealed wickedness."[2] And what will be the consequence thereof? From one seed that is planted a hundred others frequently grow; and so, too, when one has concealed one sin, a whole harvest of wickedness is the result, as the same Prophet says: "You have reaped iniquity."[3] To say nothing of the fact that, when one is in the state of sin, he cannot long refrain from other sins, on account of the loss of God's special graces, and the darkness of his understanding; you have, at all events, committed another mortal sin, by making a bad confession; you have gone to holy Communion afterwards, and thus you have again increased your guilt; next month you go to confession and holy Communion again, but say nothing of the sin you have concealed, and, of course, you only add to your sins. Now, when that has been going on for the third, fourth, tenth, twentieth time, and for perhaps two, three, or ten years, what a fearful harvest of sin you thus reap, besides what you commit against the other commandments of God! At last you make up your mind to unbosom yourself, to overcome your shame, and to confess the sin you have so long kept to yourself; and you say: so and so many years ago I concealed that sin in confession, or I did not confess it properly. But that is not yet enough; you must say also how often during that time you went to confession and received holy Communion or any other sacrament; and, moreover, you must repeat, with their number and necessary circumstances, all the sins you committed and confessed during that time. Why so? you ask; have I not confessed them already? No matter; they must all be again declared, because not one of them has been forgiven; nay, it would have been better for you not to have gone to confession at all.

along with it.

Now try to take a reasonable view of the matter; if one sin can thus tie your tongue, what will not so many sins that follow from it be able to do? If you now persuade yourself that you have a mountain of difficulty to contend with, what will it be afterwards,

And therefore will have more reason for shame.

[1] Arastis impietatem—Osee x. 13.
[2] Reticuistis impietatem.—Ibid.
[3] Iniquitatem messuistis.—Ibid.

when the mountain will be much higher? If you are ashamed to tell one sin now, how great will not your shame be when you have a whole catalogue of sins to reveal? Now you can tell the sin in less time than it takes to say the "Our Father;" afterwards it will take you an hour or more to make your confession. Now you can finish your case completely, so that you will never have to say a word about it again; afterwards, in your invalid confessions, you must make known your shame, and repeat them all when you make up your mind to tell the sin you have concealed, so that you will have to suffer more shame, to suffer it longer, and to suffer it more frequently. Is it not folly to choose a long and painful illness instead of a passing indisposition? I will say nothing of the gnawing of conscience which torments you day and night, and continually reproaches you with your secret guilt (a bad tooth is always aching until it is pulled out); nothing of the exceeding great injury done your soul, for, during the whole time you are in the state of sin, not all your good works are meritorious of heaven; nor of the terrible risk you run of dying at any moment, and being hurled into hell.

He acts foolishly in not telling the sin at once.

O foolish mortal, how easily you could avoid all this evil now! If a thorn gets into your foot, you pull it out at once, although you hurt yourself in doing so; for if you allow it to remain in the flesh, you will have to cut it out, and thereby cause you great pain. How long will you keep that thorn, that concealed sin, in your conscience? Is it not better for you to take it out at once by a good confession, and at the cost of a little shame to yourself, than to allow it to rankle for a long time, so that, if you wish afterwards to get rid of it, you will have far more to suffer? Ah, how you will deplore your folly hereafter!

Shown by a simile from Scripture.

In the First Book of Exodus we read, that king Pharao commanded that all the male children of the Israelites should be drowned as soon as they were born, in order to destroy the nation utterly. But when Moses was born his mother concealed him for three months, for he was so beautiful that she was determined to do all she could to save his life: "Seeing him a goodly child, she hid him for three months."[1] But when she saw that it was impossible to hide him any longer, she made a basket, and, putting him into it, placed it in the Nile, thus entrusting his life to the care of Providence. Imagine, my dear brethren, the grief of the parents. How great must have been the sorrow they experienced! And why? Because they were

[1] Videns eum elegantem, abscondit tribus mensibus.—Exod. ii. 2.

forced to expose the child in the river? Not so much on that account, says Philo, as because they had not done it before; for it certainly would have pained them less to have got rid of the child immediately after his birth. As it was, they kept him for three months, and during that time could admire his beauty, so that the pain of parting with him was immensely increased. "We should have exposed our child," says Philo, speaking in the person of the parents, "immediately after his birth; but we kept him alive for three months, to our greater sorrow." [1]

And will one day bewail his folly.

Christian soul, you have conceived an abominable sin in your heart, and have brought it forth by your works. "He hath been in labor with injustice," [2] says David of the sinner. God has commanded you, under pain of eternal damnation, to cast that miserable offspring of yours into the waters of penance and to drown it there; but what do you do? You conceal and hide it for three months, and perhaps for several years, through shame. And what better are you for that? You know that you must tell your sin some time or other, or else you will be lost forever. Do you not see that you are only increasing your shame and anguish by putting off the confession of it? For the longer you conceal it, the more difficult will it be for you to tell it. You should have confessed the sin at once, after having committed it, and thus freed your conscience from the burden of it. "We should have exposed our child immediately after his birth." Ah, certainly, would that I had stifled that wretched offspring of mine as soon as it made its appearance! Fool that I am, to have borne it in my bosom for such a long time! And now, to my greater shame, I must declare it! See, O sinner, what a foolish thing it is for you to conceal, or not to confess properly, your sin; for, in order to avoid a just, holy, and honorable, nay, purely imaginary shame, you expose yourself to far worse shame in the present life, and, if you persist in your determination to conceal that sin, to endless shame and disgrace in the next life: as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

The shame in confessing one's sins is only imaginary when one

I have said "a purely imaginary shame," for it is one that exists merely in the imagination, and not in reality, whether we consider the person who confesses, the sin that he has to confess, or the person to whom he confesses it. In the first place, who

[1] Debueramus recens natum exponere; per tres menses aluimus nobis majorem tristitiam.—Phil. de vita Moys.

[2] Peperit iniquitatem.—Ps. vii. 15.

considers himself and what he has to confess.

accuses you? You yourself, and no other, as I have said when speaking of the sacrament of penance as an easy means of recovering the grace of God. Again, what have you to confess? A sin that you have committed. That is truly a disgraceful thing; but are you the only one in the world who has sinned? If sin were something unusual, people might be surprised at your wickedness: but, alas, the world is full of guilt like yours. Where is the man who can say that he has never sinned? St. John would at once convict him of a lie. We are all sinners without exception, and perhaps you are not by far the greatest. There are many saints now in heaven who before their conversion committed far worse sins than you. You have on your conscience a sin of impurity, for that is generally the only class of sin that makes us dumb in the confessional; but you have as your companions St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, and countless others. Now, if suffering is lessened by being shared with many, nay, if it is even a consolation to have companions in suffering, then it must also lessen your shame in confessing your sin to know that the majority of men must acknowledge themselves just as guilty as you. Nor do I say this in order to show that we should make light of sin (for it will not lessen the malice of your sin, nor free you from eternal damnation to have companions in wickedness), but to show that, when you have committed a sin, you should candidly confess it.

And him to whom he has to confess.

Finally, to whom must you declare your sin? Is it not to a man like yourself, as I have already explained? If God had commanded you to confess your guilt publicly before the world, or at least before the congregation assembled in church, as was the custom amongst the early Christians, there is no doubt but that you would have to obey, and should moreover consider it a great favor to be enabled to escape eternal damnation by suffering a little shame in this life. But as it is the good God is satisfied if you confess your sins in secret, and only once, to one man, who is a sinner like yourself; and you can select any approved priest you wish, even one who does not know you; nor are you obliged to tell him your name; you can go to him in the evening and cover your face, so that he cannot see you; nor is there the least danger that he will ever breathe a syllable of what he hears from you. Yes, you say, I know that, and am well aware that my confessor must keep the secret of the confessional; but what will he think of me when he hears what I have done? What opinion will he form of me? If he is

acquainted with me, every time he sees me, he will think: see, there is the person who has done so-and-so. What foolish fancies those are! What has he to think of you in the confessional? He will think that it is a good thing for you to repent of such a sin; and if he happens by chance to recollect what you have told him, he will remember the humility and candor with which you accused yourself, and the repentance and sorrow you felt; and therefore he will think to himself that it would be well for all penitents if they made such a good confession. Perhaps your confessor was formerly a greater sinner than you; and if that is the case, he will think, with shame, that he is far more guilty than you, and that his sins were more grievous than yours. If he is a pious, holy man, he will have pity on you, and will rejoice that he has been the means of saving your soul from hell, as I have shown more at length when speaking of the choice of a confessor. Thus you see that you have not the least reason to allow shame or fear to prevent you from confessing your sins, and that what you fancy a difficulty exists only in your own imagination.

To avoid it he puts himself to shame before all men at the Last Day.

But if you will not conquer this imaginary shame, what confusion you will bring upon yourself hereafter by concealing your sins! For you will certainly be put to infinite shame before all men, and not before one merely, at the Last Judgment; not before one sinful mortal, but in presence of all the demons and reprobate of hell; not before one just man, but in presence of all the angels and saints of heaven; not before one man who is full of pity for you, but before all creatures, who shall be embittered against you and seek for vengeance on you; not to be justified and absolved, but to be condemned; and under those circumstances you will have to declare openly the sin you now conceal. And the confusion that will then overwhelm you will be eternal, for it will never fade from the memory of the just, or of the wicked, nor will it ever cease to torment your own conscience. "Behold," threatens the Lord by the Prophet Nahum, "I come against thee, saith the Lord of hosts . . . and I will show thy nakedness to the nations, and thy shame to kingdoms . . . and will disgrace thee and will make an example of thee."[1] Ah, think what a terrible disgrace that would be! You now enter the confessional, in which one man is sitting with the intention of helping you, as if you were going into a torture-chamber;

[1] Ecce, ego ad te, dicit Dominus exercituum, et ostendam gentibus nuditatem tuam, et regnis ignominiam tuam; et contumeliis te afficiam, et ponam te in exemplum.—Nahum iii. 5, 6.

what will you not suffer if you have to disclose all your crimes before the same confessor from whom you wish to conceal them now, and before heaven and earth as well?

How great that shame will be. Shown by a simile.

A certain prince once missed his watch, which he had placed on his table. He asked what had become of it; but no one could tell him. At last he ordered all the rooms to be searched, and the watch was heard striking in the pocket of a page, and thus the thief was betrayed. Imagine the confusion of the culprit, at being thus found out in a theft in presence of the prince and his courtiers! How great must have been his terror when he heard the first stroke of the watch, and how willingly he would have stopped it! Sinner, you have committed a theft and a sacrilege when you feloniously concealed in your own conscience a sin you ought to have declared in confession: Oh, how that watch will strike and betray you, and put you to shame before all creatures! "Our very sins," says St. Gregory, "have voices;"[1] and they will cry out against you, as St. Bernard says: "Thou hast made us; we are Thy work."[2] Here is the impure thought you would not confess; I am your work, the work of your imagination and consent, and you are the thief. Here is that brutish action you committed by yourself, thinking that no one would know anything about it; I am the work of your hands, and you are the thief. Here is that sin of adultery that you have concealed from your husband or wife, or, what is worse, from your confessor; I am the work of your wantonness, and you are the thief. Here is the impurity you committed in that company, and which you did not confess; here is the sin that you so craftily tried to palliate in the confession, or to tell in such a way that the priest did not understand you. All these sins will cry out against you, we are your work, you are the thief. Father, mother, wife, husband, hear what your child, or wife, or husband has done; and hear it, too, all men and angels! Oh, how you will then, for very shame, call upon the mountains and hills to cover you, but in vain!

Exhortation to all to confess their sins candidly.

Christians, if any of you have ever concealed a sin in confession, "What fruit, therefore, had you then in those things, of which you are now ashamed?"[3] Such is the question I ask you, in the words of St. Paul, by way of conclusion; but I make a slight change in it, and say: what advantage do you derive from those sins that you were ashamed to confess? If you think of

[1] Etiam peccata suas voces habent. [2] Tu nos fecisti; opera tua sumus.
[3] Quem ergo fructum habuistis tunc in illis, in quibus nunc erubescitis?—Rom. vi. 21.

confessing them at some future time, then you cannot but see that your shame will be all the greater and more poignant. If you do not think of confessing them at all, you are lost forever, and your shame will never be blotted out. Consider the matter, then, according to common sense; see how foolishly you have acted, and make up your mind to follow the advice of the wise Ecclesiasticus: "Be not ashamed to confess thy sins,"[1] and to confess them all honestly and candidly. And that the devil may not increase your fear and shame while you are in the confessional, do like David when he went against the Philistines in his shepherd's dress. He first of all overcame and slew the giant Goliath, and when the Philistines saw their champion conquered, they took to flight. Do you, also, first cut off the head of Goliath; confess first of all the sin you are most ashamed of, and then you will have little difficulty in confessing the others. If you cannot summon up courage enough to tell it to your ordinary confessor, who has a good opinion of you, then there are confessors enough; choose any one you please; for in such circumstances it is better to change, for once, than to make a bad confession. If you have a sin on your conscience for the last ten, twenty, fifty years, be not ashamed on that account; the priest will receive you with the greatest kindness, mildness, and charity; at least, he must do so, if he is an experienced and pious confessor; and he will rejoice at having the opportunity of freeing your soul from its miserable state, and winning it back to God. Do you, perhaps, think that it is impossible for you to remember all the sins you have committed in so many years? Then take courage; the priest, if he has even ever so little experience, will help you, and you will be able to make your confession without difficulty. You should be afraid of the all-seeing eye of God, that nothing can escape, and encouraged by the peace of conscience which you will infallibly enjoy, if you only bravely make up your mind to unbosom yourself fully.

Prayer to God to conquer shame in the confessional.

I know that you will have to overcome yourself to do this, and therefore you must first fly for refuge to Jesus Christ, Our Saviour, with the humble prayer that He may deign to strengthen your heart by the precious Blood He has shed for you, and by the powerful help of His grace, so that you may conquer your fear and shame. Diodorus Siculus says that there is in Morocco a water of such extraordinary virtue that a criminal who drinks it, no matter how hardened he is, is compelled to confess his

[1] Non confundaris confiteri peccata tua. -Ecclus. iv. 31.

crime openly; "the water," he says, "is of the color of vermilion, and has a sweet odor, and is endowed with the power of making him who drinks it confess his secret faults."[1] Whether this is true, my dear brethren, and, if so, how water can have that power, I will not now stop to inquire. But there is no doubt that from the wounds of Jesus a far more precious water flows, that enables us to open our mouths in the tribunal of penance in order to confess our sins. Therefore, O most bounteous Saviour, we beg of Thee humbly, by the infinite merits of Thy precious Blood, to open the mouth of that young man, who has so long kept his guilt concealed in his heart! Open the mouth of that young girl, whose silence in the confessional has turned all her confessions and Communions into sacrileges! Open the mouth of that man, who, through having concealed a sin in his youth, has now grown old in wickedness! Grant, O Lord, that this very day they may all have their tongues loosed, and that each of them may make this firm resolution and say with St. Augustine, Thy penitent servant: O my God, I have sinned grievously and shamefully, nor can I deny it; I am sensible of the shame I shall feel at having to declare my sins, but Thou, O Lord, wishest that I should bear that shame as an atonement for my sins; it is just that I should fulfil Thy holy will! Yes, my God, I have deserved to be put to shame before the demons of hell; and therefore I will cast myself at the feet of the priest, as I should have done long since, and to him who sits there in Thy place I will candidly declare all my transgressions: "do Thou graciously receive the sacrifice of my confession from the hands of my tongue,"[2] so that I may be freed at last from my sins, and may escape shame in this life, and endless shame in the next. Amen.

[1] Aqua ejus colorem similem minio, et odorem suavem refert, virtute mirabili, et quæ pota cogat occulta errata fateri.—Diodor. Sicul., l. iii., c. 5.

[2] Accipe sacrificium confessionum mearum de manu linguæ meæ.

ON MAKING A GENERAL CONFESSION.

THIRTY-THIRD SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION AS FAR AS ONE'S PAST LIFE IS CONCERNED.

Subject.

A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin, as far as one's past life is concerned.—*Preached on the seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Diliges Dominum Deum tuum ex toto corde tuo.—Matt. xxii. 37. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart."

Introduction.

God, then, wishes us to love Him, but with our whole hearts; for He will not be satisfied with half of our hearts. But we cannot love God in that way, unless we banish sin from our hearts by true repentance and a thorough amendment of life. By true repentance, I say; for how many there are whose penance is only a sham, either through want of true diligence in examining their consciences, or because they have not a real supernatural sorrow for their sins and a firm purpose of amendment, or because they do not confess their sins candidly, defects that we have already duly considered. But, my dear brethren, if any one fears, or has good reason to fear, that his confession has been defective in any of those ways, then there is no better, more useful, or more necessary means for him to adopt than to make a general confession, either of his whole life, in case he has never made one before, or at least of the time that has elapsed since his last general confession. For by that means he will be most certain of having got rid of all his sins, and of

being ready in future to love God with all his heart. This I shall prove to-day, and next Sunday also.

Plan of Discourse.

A general confession cleanses the soul from all sin, as far as one's past life is concerned. Such is the whole subject of this sermon.

Give us Thy grace to this end, O Lord, but especially to those who are in need of making such a confession; we ask it of Thee through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

In a general confession all the points necessary for true repentance are more fully observed.

What is required on the part of a penitent in order to cleanse his soul from the stain of sin is, as we have seen, and as even little children learning their catechism could tell us, that he should diligently examine his conscience, have a supernatural sorrow for his sin, a firm purpose not to commit a single mortal sin again, and, finally, he must make a humble and candid confession of all his grievous sins. If he is wanting in any one of these points, or does not observe them as he should, the sacrament of penance will not help him to forgiveness, and he still remains in the state of sin. But the better and more perfectly those points are observed, the more will the soul be cleansed, and the greater the graces received in the sacrament. And, my dear brethren, those points are never better, more fully, and more earnestly observed than in a general confession, which one makes of his whole life, or, otherwise, of the sins he has committed during the time that has elapsed since his last general confession.

The conscience is examined more carefully.

In the first place, with regard to the examination of conscience, it is made with far more care and diligence than when one is preparing for his ordinary confessions. For then the sinner, enlightened by the divine inspirations, comes to the firm determination of following the advice of St. Paul, and putting off the old man altogether and putting on the new, laying aside for that purpose all worldly occupations, and shutting himself up for a time with his own conscience. Then he is able to go through the years of his childhood, from the time when he first came to the use of reason, and to consider how he has spent his youth and manhood, so as to be able to give an account of his mode of life, his daily habits and customs, and the vices to which he was most addicted. Thus, since he is in earnest about settling all his accounts with God, he will certainly not forget anything wilfully, and will find out many a sin that

would have escaped him if he were preparing for his ordinary confessions. You know, my dear brethren, what happens in a hunt. If the huntsman goes out alone, he skirts the forest, and if anything chances to run in his way, he shoots it; the greater part of the game, however, is hidden from him. But if there is a large hunting party, there are men sent into the forest to beat out the game, so that nothing can remain hidden. And so it is with most men when they go to confession. If they go a few times a year, or even once a month, in search of game, that is, to find out the sins they have committed in that time, oh, how many sins often remain hidden in the crevices of their consciences, either through carelessness, forgetfulness, or self-love! For one does not attend to the malice of those sins, or he tries to excuse them, or else he does not think of them. On the other hand, when one is preparing for a general confession of his whole life, or of a considerable portion of it, he examines most closely everything that has even the appearance of a sin, in order not to leave out anything that could afterwards make him uneasy. And he is helped in this by a special grace of God, who is wont to assist, by an extraordinary light, the man of good will, who is in earnest about being converted to Him with his whole heart. If you enter a room that has been newly swept out you would hardly think that a speck of dust could be found in it; but if a ray of the sun finds its way in, you will see clouds of dust that were before invisible. The light of grace has the same effect in the soul of one who has made up his mind to lead a new life, and who, therefore, after having implored the assistance of the Holy Ghost, sets to work to examine his past years.

One's sins are brought to mind in greater number.

In the second place, after such a careful examen of conscience, his sorrow for sin is far greater than in his usual confessions. Nor can it well be otherwise, for his sins appear to him like a huge mountain placed before his eyes, so that he in truth might sigh forth with Esdras: "My God, I am confounded and ashamed to lift up my face to Thee; for our iniquities are multiplied over our head, and our sins are grown up even unto heaven." [1] When I look back on my life from the time when I first came to the use of reason, I find hardly anything but sin, odious ingratitude towards my God, and shameful transgressions of His law. There is no end to the crimes that I have committed during those years, in thoughts and desires, in words and conver-

[1] Deus meus, confundor et erubesco levare faciem meam ad te; quoniam iniquitates nostræ multiplicatæ sunt super caput nostrum, et delicta nostra creverunt usque ad cœlum.—I. Esdr. ix. 6.

sations, and in outward acts, with eyes, ears, tongue, hands, against my God, my neighbor, and myself. Thus he arrives at a clear knowledge of his misery, his poverty, and the woful misuse he has made of his time. And this is the meaning of the words of Ecclesiasticus: "As when one sifteth with a sieve, the dust will remain: so will the perplexity of a man in his thoughts;"[1] that is to say, when a man considers himself carefully, he sees nothing but his misery. If you look at one who is sifting wheat, in a short time you will not be able to see the good grain, because it has fallen out, and nothing is visible but the chaff. Very often a man gives way to self-complacency, and thinks himself to be good and pious, because he performs certain good works every day, and is not so wicked as many a great sinner in the world; and so it is difficult to bring him to have a really humble opinion of himself, and a real compunction of heart. But, poor mortal that you are, how can you have such an opinion of yourself? Set to work and shake the sieve of your conscience; examine your whole life, and you will soon lose sight of your good works. And what will you find left? "The perplexity of a man in his thoughts;" nothing but filth, and misery, and ingratitude, and countless sins.

From which arises a far greater sorrow and confusion at the thought of one's sins.

From the knowledge you thus gain by the examination of your whole life, says St. John Chrysostom, there will arise in you a salutary confusion and a bitter sorrow of heart. You will be filled with shame at the sight of your sins, and with wonder at the infinite mercy of God, who has borne with you so patiently for such a long time, in spite of your manifold offences. O my God, you will think, is it possible that Thou hast allowed me to remain on earth all this time? In my whole life I can hardly find one good action done with a pure intention for Thy sake, in which there is not some mixture of vain self-complacency, or human respect, or self-love. All the other acts of my life are so many faults, so many steps taken away from my last end, so many debts that Thou hast written against me in Thy account-book, and which Thou wilt one day call on me to pay. I must now acknowledge that my eyes and ears, tongue and hands, and whole body, along with my imagination, memory, understanding, heart, and will, and everything that is in me, have been so many instruments that I have misused to offend Thee, my God, who art deserving of all love. Alas, what is to become of me?

[1] Sicut in percussura cribri remanebit pulvis: sic aporia hominis in cogitatu illius.—Ecclus. xxvii. 5.

"If thou, O Lord, wilt mark iniquities: Lord who shall stand?" [1] O Lord, if Thou wilt remember all my sins and miseries, how shall I appear before Thee? If one sin is enough to deprive me of heaven and its eternal joys, and to condemn me to the everlasting torments of hell, what sort of a hell have I deserved by the countless sins that now stare me in the face? If Thou hast hurled into the depths of hell, from the heights of heaven, millions of the noblest and most beautiful creatures, for a single momentary sinful thought; if, for one sin of disobedience, Thou hast turned my first parents out of paradise, and hast, moreover, made the whole world a valley of tears, and afflicted its inhabitants with so many miseries; if there are many souls now in hell who have offended Thee by but one mortal sin in their whole lives, what sort of punishment must I expect, unless I truly repent; or what praise can I give Thy infinite goodness and mercy, inasmuch as Thou hast not cast me off long since, as I deserved, and art willing to pardon me, after I have so often and so grievously offended Thee? What can follow from such considerations as these, but sincere sorrow of heart, a thorough detestation and hatred of all sin, and an earnest, zealous love for such a good God? There is no doubt, says St. John Chrysostom, that this deep sorrow and heart-felt love are the fruit of a general confession, which places all our sins before our eyes.

As appears from the Gospel parable.

That is the meaning of the parable in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who would take an account of his servants. And when he had begun to take the account, one was brought to him, that owed him ten thousand talents." [2] That is, as commentators say, a sum equivalent to six millions of our gold florins; but when the servant humbly begged the debt to be remitted, the king graciously forgave it. "And the lord of that servant, being moved with pity, let him go, and forgave him the debt." [3] But, asks St. Chrysostom, if the king had the intention of remitting the debt, why did he first ask the servant to give an account to him? In order, he says, that the servant might know the enormous amount of his debt, and, since it was forgiven him, might all the more thoroughly detest his former faults, and serve his master with all

[1] Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine: Domine, quis sustinebit?—Ps. cxxix. 3.

[2] Assimilatum est regnum cœlorum homini regi, qui voluit rationem ponere cum servis suis. Et cum cœpisset rationem ponere, oblatus est ei unus, qui debebat ei decem millia talenta.—Matt. xviii. 23, 24.

[3] Misertus autem dominus servi illius, dimisit eum, et debitum dimisit ei.—Ibid. 27.

the more diligence and fidelity. This king is Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Judge; the debt of ten thousand talents is the amount of sin we have committed against the ten commandments. Now, O sinner, Christ demands an account from you every time you go to confession, although He is already resolved to pardon you if you appear before Him with true sorrow of heart and a firm purpose of amendment. But your ordinary confession is only an account of some weeks or months, in which the whole amount of your debts is not brought before you, so that you are not so strongly moved to sorrow for your sins. Therefore you should sometimes enter into a general statement of accounts with the almighty God, and bring before your mind all the sins you committed, from your childhood to the present moment, in thought, word, and deed, so that the consideration of the immense amount of your debt may excite in you a greater admiration of the divine patience in bearing with you, and, by giving you a clearer knowledge of your malice and ingratitude, may move you to a more heartfelt sorrow for sin.

The purpose of amendment is firmer.

In this way, too, you will have a firmer purpose of amendment than you have in your ordinary confessions. For when you call to mind the fearful amount of debt you have contracted by sin, you must necessarily be filled with a wholesome dread, and you will say to yourself, alas, what a terrible amount of evil I have done during my life! Have I not yet committed sins enough? Truly, it is high time for me to cease offending God. And now, that my iniquities are so numerous, perhaps the next mortal sin I commit may be my last, as it may fill up the allotted number of my transgressions, according to the hidden decrees of God. Perhaps the same God, who has borne with me so long, and who is now ready to forgive me my debts, may, if I should be so ungrateful as to offend Him again, forget His patience and mercy, make me the object of His implacable hatred, and, as I have already deserved thousands of times, according to the testimony of my own conscience, allow me to die in the state of final impenitence, and be lost forever. Therefore I am now resolved to give to God the remainder of the uncertain time of my life, without defrauding Him of a single moment of it.

One confesses his sins more exactly.

Shown by a simile.

Finally, in a general confession one is much more careful than usual in declaring his sins exactly, so as to confess most minutely everything that his conscience reproaches him with. Even venial faults and slight transgressions, that are not ordinarily made the subject of confession, one would not then wilfuly con-

ceal, whereas usually even grosser sins may be made little of, or an effort may be made to hide or excuse them by confessing them in such a way as to mislead the confessor regarding their guilt. In ordinary confessions the conscience is examined only superficially; in general confessions it is, so to speak, thoroughly swept out. And there is a great difference, my dear brethren, between these two. When the maid is sweeping the room, she removes with her broom all the dirt and dust she can see, but still a great deal remains hidden under the chairs and tables. But if she takes the trouble of removing the furniture, and washing the floor with her own hands, not a particle of dirt or dust can escape her, and the room is thoroughly cleaned. St. Anselm makes use of another simile. "When the water," he says, "is allowed to run out of a pond, the fishes die."[1] If you wish to take all the fish out of the pond, what do you do? If you throw out the net and drag it through from one end to the other, you will certainly take a great number of fishes, but many of them will still remain hidden in the mud at the bottom. But if you let all the water run off, not even the smallest fish will escape you, on account of the want of the element necessary to its life. Oh, how many sins lie hidden in a conscience that is in a troubled and disorderly state! Certainly, we confess our sins, but many still remain concealed in the depths which are not brought to light as they should be; we fish only with the net, or catch a few here and there with a hook. If you wish to cleanse your conscience thoroughly, let the water run off, make a general confession of your whole life, and then you will certainly find out and destroy even the smallest sins. You see now, my dear brethren, how the examen of conscience, the sorrow for sin, the purpose of amendment, the candid declaration of our sins, and everything that is required for the purifying of the soul in the holy sacrament of penance, is best and most perfectly performed in a general confession.

Many ordinary confessions are invalid on account of a defect in some of these points.

Alas! how many confessions are invalid through some great defect in one of those necessary dispositions! For people are careless in their examen of conscience, even when they have committed mortal sin; or through culpable ignorance they are in doubt about the malice of certain grievous transgressions, and do not confess them; or they content themselves with reading an act of contrition out of their prayer-books, without having a real supernatural sorrow for sin; or else their purpose of amendment is not what it should be, since they still remain attached to their

[1] Pisces, decurrente aqua, vivarii moriuntur.

old vices, or do not make the necessary restitution, or remain in the proximate occasion of sin, or do not lay aside their hatred against their neighbor, or give scandal and occasion of sin to others, or do not fulfil the duties of their state as they ought; or else they seek out an unlearned, inexperienced, unscrupulous confessor, to whom they do not honestly confess all their sins, nay, from whom they frequently, through human respect, conceal some grievous sin that they have committed. Besides, of what nature are often the confessions of young people, who frequently commit grievous sin in thought, word, and deed, and yet have not a clear idea of what is meant by supernatural sorrow, a firm purpose of amendment, and the candid declaration of their sins; and who often go to confession merely because they are sent by their parents or teachers? And thus they continue making bad confessions for five, ten, or twenty years, and bring down to their old age on their heavily-laden consciences the first sin they committed, along with the sins that followed it.

Shown by an example.

Father Paul Segneri relates that a man who had been dead many years, and whose soul was still in purgatory, appeared once to his son and complained bitterly that nothing had yet been done to relieve or help him. What, my dear father, asked the son in astonishment: it is now thirty years since you died, and not a single day has elapsed since then on which I did not hear Mass and pray fervently for the repose of your soul; moreover, I have given you all my holy Communions, as far as I could, and all the indulgences I gained, as well: how, then, is it possible that you did not experience any relief? True, said the father, you have done all that; but it has not helped me one bit, because you were not in the state of grace during the time, but were an enemy of God in mortal sin. During those thirty years you have been to confession and holy Communion over three hundred times; but your confessions were always invalid, because you never prepared for them properly. You never had a firm purpose of amendment. Having said those words, the poor soul vanished, after having made such a deep impression on the son that he determined to make a general confession of his whole life.

Hence a general confession is necessary to many, and very

My dear brethren, let us not wait till a messenger comes from the other world to warn us of the state of our souls. If we have been guilty of some grievous error, either wilfully, or through culpable ignorance, or through any other cause which has made our confessions invalid, or if we have good reason to doubt of

their validity, then a general confession is not only very useful for us, as I said in the beginning, but it is necessary for our salvation, since the faults of our former confessions cannot be repaired without it. But if we think that we have never committed a grievous mistake in our confessions, then the general confession, although it may not be absolutely necessary for us, can, at least, make us more certain that we have received pardon for all the sins of our lives. Consider the example of the penitent David: "I said," he exclaims, "I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord;"[1] that is, as Raulinus remarks, I will confess all my sins at the same time. But why so, David? Hast thou not already confessed thy sins? In the same psalm thou hast said: "I have acknowledged my sin to Thee."[2] Hast thou, perhaps, concealed something? No; for thou sayest: "my injustice I have not concealed:"[3] I have disclosed everything. Art thou, then, scrupulous or anxious? No. And why wilt thou tell all thy sins at once? David was anxious about the sins he had committed in his youth, and on account of his ignorance and want of understanding at that time of his life: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances do not remember."[4] Since he has now come to the full use of his understanding, he wishes to make a general acknowledgment of his guilt, in order to be freed from this care. Therefore he says that he is determined to confess his injustice to the Lord: that is, to confess all his sins together.

useful to nearly all, in order that they may be at peace regarding the past.

David was such a holy man, my dear brethren, after his conversion, that his conscience could not reproach him with a single sin which he had not candidly confessed to the Lord and had not shed bitter tears of repentance for, day and night; and yet he could not rest on account of the fear of having committed some grievous fault, in his youth, through ignorance and want of consideration, and, in order to ease his mind, he had recourse to a general confession. Ah! how much greater reason have not many of us to adopt the same means! For if we consider the matter rightly, we shall find that we may have reason enough to doubt whether our confessions were always what they should have been, and, therefore, whether our sins were really washed away or not. I say, reason enough, because this sermon is not intended for scrupulous and over-anxious souls; they must wait

Therefore most people have just reason to make such a confession.

[1] Dixi, confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino.—Ps. xxxi. 5.
[2] Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci.—Ibid. [3] Injustitiam meam non abscondi.—Ibid.
[4] Delicta juventutis meæ et ignorantias meas ne memineris.—Ibid. xxiv. 7.

till next Sunday, and then I will tell them when a general confession is necessary, and when it is useful or advisable. But others, and especially those who have never made a confession of the kind, may well make the same resolution as David: "I have said, I will confess against myself my injustice to the Lord," I will honestly declare before God and the priest all the sins of my whole life, from my youth down to the present moment, as far as my conscience represents them to me. If I were to derive no other advantage from such a confession, but that of having a greater sorrow of heart for the sins which I see thus in a vast heap before me; if I were to receive no other consolation but that of being able to say, now I have cleansed my conscience thoroughly, and done all that can reasonably be expected, in order to obtain forgiveness of my sins, that alone should be motive enough for me to prepare at once for a general confession. And such is really the case, my dear brethren.

Vain is the excuse of men of the world, who say they have no time for it.

Let no one try to excuse himself by saying that he has no time for that, and that he has other things to attend to; that, if he were a Religious and had nothing else to look after, he might have time and inclination thus to examine his whole life, and to make a general confession, but that men of the world cannot do such things. But why do you say that you have other business to attend to? Is there any business in the world so important as that of your immortal soul, whose eternal happiness perhaps depends on your making a good general confession? Answer me now the questions that children are asked in the catechism, why are you in this world? what is the end of your being? is it to keep your house, or your temporal business or occupation going? But these things are, according to the decrees of Providence, only means which you can direct by a good intention to the one, only, important business, for which you were created, and of which Christ said to Martha in the Gospel: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful, and art troubled about many things. But one thing is necessary."[1] But one thing is necessary, namely, to serve God, to love Him above all things, and thereby to save your soul and make sure of eternal happiness. Think often of the warning of Our Lord: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"[2] What better will he be, if by his care and diligence he gains the whole world and

[1] Martha, Martha, solicita es, et turbaris erga plurima. Porro unum est necessarium.—Luke x. 41, 42.

[2] Quid prodest homini si mundum universum lucretur, animæ vero suæ detrimentum patiatur!—Matt. xvi. 26.

all its wealth but suffers even the least loss as far as his soul is concerned?

They have all the more reason for making a general confession.

The very excuse you allege, that you are burdened with temporal cares, makes a general confession much more useful, nay, even necessary to you. For if business cares occupy your time so much that you cannot give an exact account of your daily actions, as they are in the sight of God, it is only right that you should set apart a certain time during the year in which to regulate your accounts with God by a general confession. If you belonged to a religious Order, you would have time enough every day to attend to your soul; you would examine your conscience daily, and repent of your faults, and at least every week you would go to confession and holy Communion; you would look on it as an almost impossible prodigy to offend God by a grievous sin, and yet, in spite of all those helps to salvation, you would make a general confession, every year, of the time that has elapsed since your last general confession, in order to make surer of cleansing your soul from all stain. Now, you acknowledge that in your state of life you have not such opportunities of attending to your spiritual interests; your thoughts, ideas, cares, and troubles are all directed to temporal things, while you seldom think of God or heaven. Perhaps you never examine your conscience at night before going to rest, as pious Christians, who fear God and are anxious to save their souls, always do. In all places, at home and abroad, since you have to do with all kinds of people, you are exposed to many occasions and dangers of sin in thought, word, and deed, and you can hardly be expected to come off victor in all those encounters. With a mind full of distractions, you go to confession every three months, or even every month (and indeed it is a good thing if you go so often; but even then God knows what kind of confessions you make!), and perhaps you have not yet made a general confession. Now, is it not evident that, if you are concerned about the salvation of your soul, the very circumstance you bring forward as an excuse should be an additional motive for you to prepare for a general confession?

For they have time enough for other and unnecessary things.

I have no time for it. Ah, God help you! No time for the one thing to which you should devote your whole life! You can spend a whole year in the service of the world, but you cannot spare half a day to examine your conscience and cleanse your soul from the stain of sin? Four times a year you have your house, its furniture, and even your kitchen utensils cleaned from top to

bottom; but you have no time to give your conscience a thorough purifying? You have time enough to pay and to receive unnecessary visits; time enough to talk, when you had better keep silent; time enough to waste in decking out your perishable body with all sorts of finery, for which you will have to render a strict account at the bar of divine justice; time enough to spend in amusements and parties, in gambling and in other diversions that will likely supply you with matter for your next confession; but you have no time to arrange your accounts with God, your future Judge? no time to place your soul in safety and quiet? no time to begin a better life? in a word, no time to secure for yourself an eternity of happiness after this short life? Away with that excuse of yours! It could not have been a true Christian spirit that prompted it.

It will not upset their mind or make them scrupulous, as they pretend.

Yes, say others, that is all true; but if I were to make a general confession, it would upset me completely, disturb my conscience, and make me scrupulous. Eh? Why, there is no better means of bringing peace and quiet to your conscience, and protecting it against scruples, than a good general confession of your whole life, as we shall see on another occasion. You are afraid, perhaps, to disturb the filth of your conscience, lest it should commence to stink in your nostrils too strongly? But no matter, set to work boldly, and you will get rid of it once for all. I am not clever enough for it, say others; I do not know enough; it would bother me immensely; in fact, I have quite enough to do to remember my sins for my monthly confession; what would it be, then, if I were to try to recollect all the sins I have committed during my whole life? This is another vain excuse. If you only try it, you will get on well enough; the God of goodness and mercy will help you with His light and grace, as we have seen already, if you are only in earnest about being converted to Him, and beg of Him humbly to assist you.

Exhortation to make a general confession and short instruction as to how to set about it.

Divide your life into periods; from your seventh to your twelfth year; from your twelfth year to the time when you entered on a permanent state of life, a period during which, generally speaking, most sins are committed, on account of the vehemence of passion and the inconsiderateness of youth; and finally, from that time to the present. Go through the ten commandments, and see what you have done against them in the different periods; your confessor, if he is an experienced man, will help you in this, if you come to him at a time when he has no other penitents to attend to (for it is generally better not to make such

a confession when there are many people waiting). The sins that you cannot remember after reasonable diligence in the examen of your conscience you are not bound to tell; nor are you expected to be so exact in declaring the number of your sins as in your ordinary confessions, unless you have to make good some fault committed in declaring them. Try it only, in God's name, and you will find that it is not such a very difficult matter, after all. You will thank him who advised you to take that step, when you find what peace it will bring your conscience; and, as far as your past life is concerned, you will be certain that all your accounts with God are in good order, and that your sins are as completely forgiven as Frederic of Arragon forgave the crimes of his subjects. These latter, having rebelled against their sovereign, begged to be forgiven, and the king, to show how completely he pardoned them, caused to be painted a book surrounded with flames of fire, under which was written the motto, "let the past be forgotten."[1] Thus, being completely cleansed from your sins, you will be enabled to begin a new life and to say, with the Apostle: "And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me,[2] whom alone I am resolved to love with all my heart for the remainder of my life. Amen.

THIRTY-FOURTH SERMON.

ON THE ADVANTAGE OF A GENERAL CONFESSION AS FAR AS THE NEXT LIFE IS CONCERNED.

Subject.

1. The best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life is a general confession. 2. To whom a confession of the kind is to be recommended.—*Preached on the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.*

Text.

Confide, fili, remittuntur tibi peccata tua.—Matt. ix. 2.
"Be of good heart, son, thy sins are forgiven thee."

[1] Recedant vetera.
[2] Vivo autem, jam non ego: vivit vero in me Christus.—Gal. ii. 20.

Introduction.

What a good and generous Redeemer we have! The only object the paralytic man had in appearing before Our Lord was to recover the health of his body; and not only did he receive that, but something infinitely more valuable, which he did not even dream of asking, namely, the forgiveness of his sins and the sanctification of his soul. "Be of good heart, son," were the words he heard from Our Lord, "thy sins are forgiven thee." O sinners, who are grievously ill in your souls, come quickly and appeal to such a good and merciful God; make known to Him, in the holy sacrament of penance, the maladies you are suffering from, and beg of Him with contrite hearts to help you, and you will at once be restored to health. Last Sunday I showed that a general confession of one's whole life, or at least of the time that has elapsed since the last general confession, is the best means of cleansing one's soul from sin, as far as the past is concerned. As a further encouragement to us to have recourse to this means, I now say,

Plan of Discourse.

The best means of placing the soul in safety and security for the next life is a general confession; this I shall prove in the first part. Should all, then, without exception, make a general confession of their whole lives? I shall answer that question in the second part.

O Lord Jesus, grant us Thy necessary light and grace, through the intercession of Mary, Thy Mother, and of the holy guardian angels, that, after having made a good confession of all our sins, we may merit to hear, in repose and security of conscience, the consoling words: "Be of good heart, son; thy sins are forgiven thee."

The best repose in this life consists in a good conscience.

The true repose and safety of the soul in this life consists in a good conscience, which cannot reproach one with any sin that he has not repented of, and which, as far as is possible on this earth, assures him that he is in the favor and grace of God, and that there is no debt entered against him in the great account-book, so that he can console himself with the assurance that he is a beloved friend and child of God, and a lawful heir to the kingdom of heaven. Oh, certainly, that is a consolation that far surpasses every earthly joy and pleasure, no matter how great the latter may be. But if there is a well-founded doubt concerning even one grievous sin, as to whether it has been for-

given or not, this repose and safety are disturbed; the worm commences to gnaw; the soul cannot rejoice and be glad in the Lord. Therefore we often hear good and pious Christians,—for, as a general rule, they who are accustomed to a vicious life become careless in those things,—we often hear them complain, ah, I wish I were certain that I have had a proper supernatural sorrow for all my past sins; that I have declared them all candidly in confession; that they are really forgiven, and that I am in the state of sanctifying grace! And who can assure you of that? Do you expect an angel to come down from heaven for the purpose?

It is best procured by a general confession. Shown by a simile.

Yet you have in your own conscience an angel that can give you a moral assurance to that effect, if you make, after reasonable diligence in preparation, a general confession of your whole life. If there is anything that can give the desired repose to the soul in this particular, it is a confession of the kind. The official who gives an account of his stewardship to his superior every quarter, and has the latter's sign manual to testify that his accounts are in good order, can be quite certain that no complaint can be made against him. Yet it may happen that, when the accounts of several years are examined together, grievous errors, that previously escaped notice, will be detected, so that, for the official to be fully at rest, he must have a document from his superior to prove that for several years no mistake has occurred in his accounts; when he has that, he can be perfectly certain that neither himself nor his heirs will have any further trouble about the matter. It is the same with the human soul, which is placed as a steward over certain goods by the Almighty. "Give an account of Thy stewardship;"[1] says God to us whenever we go to confession. Our ordinary confessions are special renderings of accounts that we make to God every three months, or month, or fortnight, or week, according as we go to confession frequently or not; and if we have always a true sorrow for sin and a firm purpose of amendment, they are signed by God as valid, and we can be easy in conscience. But since it may often happen that one has good reason for thinking that perhaps he has committed some notable error in one or other of those confessions, in order to allay his doubts and bring repose to his conscience once for all, the best thing he can do is to examine all his former accounts, that is, to make a general examination of his conscience, and a confession,

[1] Redde rationem villicationis tuæ.—Luke xvi. 2.

either of the sins of his whole life, or of those he has committed since his last general confession.

For thereby one is, as it were, assured that his sins are all forgiven forever.

In a confession of this kind one receives a document written with the Blood of Jesus Christ, to prove that his accounts for the past years are now in good order, and he can have a reasonable confidence and assurance that all the debts he contracted with God are paid, and that God will make no further claim on him as far as his past sins are concerned. And even if he forgets some grievous sins in that confession, he is still assured, since he has used all reasonable diligence, that he has done all that is required on his part to repent properly, and, therefore, that he will never again, during his whole life, be bound to confess those sins, or even to think of them. But if a doubt should occur to him as to whether he has confessed this or that sin, he has always good reason for believing that he has confessed everything properly, so that he is not bound to examine his conscience on the matter any more. In a word, he may be quite at rest, and can rejoice in the Lord with his whole heart, and say to himself: now I have nothing more to fear with regard to my past sins; all I have to do now is to be careful not to fall again into sin, and to serve with more zeal than ever the good and merciful God, who has blotted out all my sins at once.

From this assurance arises the greatest joy one can have on earth.

What consolation and joy it is for a soul that is really desirous of salvation to have an assurance of this kind, and to be freed from all anxiety regarding the past! Eating, drinking, dancing, and all ye other amusements of the vain children of the world, I laugh at you, if I only have that sweet repose and security of conscience; for I would not barter it for all the delights of earth! William, duke of Aquitaine, was of the same opinion. He went once into retreat and made a general confession of his whole wicked life to St. Bernard; and after he had done so, he said that, although he had refused himself no pleasure that he could possibly procure, he never had any satisfaction equal to that which he derived from that general confession. Nor can it be otherwise. I wish that all who have once thoroughly cleansed their consciences by a general confession, and I am sure there must be many such here present, could let us know what they felt on the occasion; I have not the least doubt that they would assure us that they were inundated by a feeling of unusual repose and heavenly consolation. Let him who does not believe this put it to the proof; otherwise he will be pro-

nouncing on a matter of which he knows nothing, like a blind man pretending to judge of color.

A joy that is not disturbed by future sin.

Yes, some may perhaps think; but how long will that peace of mind last? God help us! before we have time to look round, we fall into mortal sin again, and are just as bad as before; so, what is the good of a general confession? Do you, then, really think it is of no use? Suppose that after your general confession you were to return, like the dog, to your vomit, and to fall again into sin (for repentance does not make such a change in our poor nature as to prevent us from sinning again), does that render useless all you have done? Would you not care about cleaning out your kettle, because you know that it will soon become rusty again? Will you not sweep out your room, because you know that in a day it will be filled with dust? You have, at all events, the consolation of knowing that for the remainder of your life, nay, for all eternity, your conscience is purified from the sins of all those past years, and from all anxiety and reasonable doubt concerning them. Is not that consolation enough? And, besides, it is much easier for you to confess from year to year the sins you may commit in future. Do you still think the general confession of no use?

A general confession is also the best means of avoiding sin in future.

But you say that you have scarcely time to look round, when you fall again into sin. Yes, that can easily be the case after ordinary confessions, in which you have not, perhaps, true sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment; but there is not so much danger of it when one, out of a pure desire of being converted to God with his whole heart, makes a general confession, and thereby thoroughly cleanses his conscience. When a room is properly cleaned out, one cannot bear to see the least speck of dust in it, and is careful about allowing even a piece of paper to fall on the floor. Nay, in some houses there are slippers placed at the door, so that those who enter may put them on, in order to avoid soiling the floor with their muddy shoes. But if a long time has elapsed since the room was cleaned out, one is not nearly so careful about soiling the floor; it does not matter much, he thinks; it will be all swept out when the room is cleaned. So it is too with the soul and the conscience of man. He who is already in the state of sin is not, generally speaking, very scrupulous about committing fresh sins; the next confession, he thinks, will clear them all away. But when the conscience is once thoroughly purified, which is done with the greatest certainty by a general confession, one is most careful not to sully it

again by a mortal sin. For he who has once tasted the sweets of a peaceful conscience thinks too much of them to part with them lightly, so that the least appearance of sin is able to frighten one who formerly did not hesitate to go into the proximate occasion of sin. Besides, there are special graces and helps that God, who will not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity by a creature, gives to him who has been converted with his whole heart, in order to keep him in the state of grace. Those who have had experience of it could testify to the truth of this, and many of them could say, with truth, that for years after their first general confession they did not commit one mortal sin; and many others, that during their whole lives they never fell back into grievous sin; while all of them can ascribe to the general confession the beginning of the holy lives they afterwards led. Hence almost for all future time a general confession places the soul in a state of repose and security.

How terrible the remembrance of our sins at the hour of death!

And what a great consolation is derived from it in the hour of death, when the soul is about to depart on its long journey into eternity; in that terrible moment, when the command is given to us: "Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live."[1] What can a poor mortal think in that moment, if his accounts with God are not in good order? Who has not heard of the terrible temptations and assaults with which the Evil One attacks even the most holy souls in the hour of death? That pious monk of whom St. John Climacus writes could tell us about them: the day before his death he lay for some time as if in an ecstasy, during which he kept answering an invisible interrogator. "Yes," he would say, "I have done that, but I have confessed and repented of it;" "no," he would exclaim, in answer to another question, "I did not do that;" or else, "I have been guilty of it, but I have done penance;" or, "I hope that through the mercy of God I will be forgiven." Ah Christians, if such things happen to holy servants of God, who have led lives of penance and mortification, how will it be with those who with the utmost indifference commit one sin after another, and pay little attention to the great business of their soul's salvation? "Alas," sighs St. Bernard, "how many things will then occur to us, which we either did not look on as sins, or thought so little of, that we did not even give ourselves the trouble of repenting of and confessing them."[2] How many grievous sins will then

[1] Dispone domui tuæ, quia morieris tu, et non vives.—Isa. xxxviii. 1.

[2] Heu, quanta tunc in mentem venient, quæ nunc vell nulla esse putantes, inconfessa atque impurgata relinquimus.—S. Bern., serm. de Virg.

occur to us, that we now look on as doubtful? How many sins that we have caused others to commit by giving scandal, by impure conversation, by immodesty in dress, by exposing indecent pictures and statues in our houses, or by giving bad example, that we do not even think of now? How many invalid or doubtful confessions, in childhood, youth, or manhood, through culpable ignorance, shame, or want of true sorrow and purpose of amendment, which will then torture the departing soul? And how happy they will be who, like the dying monk, can answer boldly, yes, I did that, but I repented of it, and I trust in the mercy of God?

Then it will be a source of the greatest comfort to have made a general confession.

Such, my dear brethren, is the consolation and security enjoyed by him who has got rid of all his sins by a good general confession. He can meet without dread the attacks of the devil, who will try to inspire him with fear or anxiety regarding his past confessions and sins; and he can say to himself, whatever I have done during the last twenty, thirty, or forty years of my life to offend God, along with the errors I committed in my confessions and the doubts that occurred to me, I have settled once for all by a general confession, so that I need not examine myself any more on those things, nor even think of them. Whatever I have done against the commandments since then, I have repented of and confessed in the same way from one year to another. My accounts with God are in good order, and are signed in approval by the precious Blood of Jesus Christ. All my sins are washed away, with the sole exception of those I have committed since my last confession. Avaunt, Satan; you can find nothing in me to make me afraid of my Judge, for I have been already reconciled to Him! What an exceeding joy and consolation for a soul about to depart from this world to be so well prepared to meet its Judge.

Shown by an example.

Father Ambrose Cataneus, in his "Treatise on a Happy Death," relates the following instance of a nobleman who did not lead a very Christian or pious life. One day the thought struck him that he could not long continue in his vicious habits without coming to a miserable end, and he made up his mind to go on a retreat for a few days, in order to examine his conscience and to prepare for a general confession of his whole life. He carried his design happily into execution, and was thereupon filled with such heavenly consolation that he could never think of the confession he had made without shedding tears of joy. As he was lying in his last illness, and felt that death was approaching, he

said aloud to those who were standing round: "I should have been lost forever, if the good God had not given me the grace to make a general confession; whenever I think of it now, it seems to me that I have in my hands a document which ensures to me the possession of eternal happiness." He himself was the only one who was able, in his last moments, to console his sorrowing wife and children, and to exhort them to avoid sin and to serve God zealously. A quarter of an hour before he died, he caused the good resolutions he had written out after his general confession to be read to him; and at every word he gave evident signs of the great consolation and joy he felt. In that happy state he gave up his soul into the hands of his Maker, and, as we cannot doubt, entered into a blissful eternity.

To have that comfort in life and death we should make a general confession.

I look on it as certain, my dear brethren, that we all wish and desire an end like that; nor do I doubt for a moment that, when the last hour comes for us, we shall be glad to have got rid of all stain of sin completely by a good general confession; or, at least, if we have not made one up to that time, we shall certainly wish to make one then. And why do we not do so at once, since we have now a favorable opportunity? Good reason had that criminal, of whom Father Christopher Vega writes, to speak as he did; the day before his execution he sent for a priest of our Society, and said to him, "Father, do you know what we have both to do now? All the sins I have ever committed must be cleared off my conscience this very day." "And why so?" asked the priest, who was well inclined to encourage him in his holy resolution. "To-morrow," answered the other, "I have to take a leap from this world into another, and in order to be sure of doing it well I must go back and take a run to it." His meaning was that he had to examine his whole life, and by a good confession cleanse his soul from all the sins he had committed. And he did well, because he was about to die. Still better was the answer given by a gentleman who, while still in good health, wished to make a general confession. The priest asked him why he had come to that determination. "Why do you ask me," was the answer? "Must I not die some time or other? Is not death always hurrying after me? How do I know when, where, and how it will overtake me? In my last illness I will have enough to do with my sickness and sufferings, with my children, domestics, and the friends who will visit me; so that I now wish to take time by the forelock, and to do with the greatest care that on which my eternal salvation depends, and which I shall probab-

ly not be able to attend to in my last moments." Let us all, my dear brethren, follow the example of this prudent and good Christian. Now, that we are sound in mind and body, let us do what we shall certainly wish to have done on our death-bed, and cleanse our souls from all the sins of our lives by a good general confession; and then, whether death comes soon or late, suddenly or after a long illness, we can meet it whenever or wherever it comes, bravely and with the assurance of eternal salvation; for it will never find us unprepared. Thus we shall be at peace during life, and consoled and comforted at the hour of death. But are we to understand that a general confession is to be recommended to all Christians without exception? This question I shall answer in the

Second Part.

A general confession is necessary, or at least very useful, ordinarily speaking, for those who have not yet made one.

In the first place, with regard to those who have never made a general confession, it is, ordinarily speaking, to be recommended to them. For some it is absolutely necessary; and for nearly all the others, it is of the greatest advantage to their souls. It is necessary for those who, as we have seen already, have either concealed a mortal sin wilfully in confession, through fear and shame, or who know that their past confessions were invalid through want of a true supernatural sorrow and purpose of amendment, or because they did not confess their sins candidly, or, at least, have good reason for doubts on the subject. Moreover, he who has for years led a dissolute, sinful life, or has been careless in the divine service, and now feels an inspiration from God to begin a new and a better mode of life, will find that a general confession is not only useful, but even necessary. But for the others, although they may not be anxious about their past confessions, it is very advantageous, both to make sure of having corrected any fault they may have committed in their past confessions, and to set their consciences more at rest, and give more stability to their good resolutions.

It is a different thing with those who have made one already.

In the second place, the question is, whether they who have already made with reasonable diligence a general confession of their whole lives would do well to repeat that confession. And my answer is, no; for, generally speaking, that would not be good for most people, while for some it would be positively injurious, for others very dangerous, and for none necessary.

Not good for scrupulous

There are some anxious, melancholy, and scrupulous souls who are never at ease, no matter how often they go to confession.

persons to repeat their confessions.

They are always dejected and filled with bitterness of heart; they never can satisfy their uneasy consciences, and there is always a doubt, although an unreasonable one, to torment them, an ever-recurring "perhaps" to trouble their peace of mind. Perhaps, they say, I have not confessed that properly; perhaps I have never had true sorrow and firm purpose of amendment; perhaps my confessor did not understand all I said to him; perhaps I was not validly absolved, etc. And the more they examine themselves, the more bewildered do they become. For such people a repetition of their general confession would be not only useless, but even highly injurious; it would be for them, not a medicine to give them relief, but rather a rack to torture them; and, instead of restoring them to health, it only aggravates their disease. They are like people who have sore eyes; the more they rub them, the worse they become. They have, in fact, just as little chance of finding peace by repeating their confessions, as one has of cleaning muddy water by keeping it constantly stirred up; it must be allowed to remain still for a time, so that it can have time to settle.

They must obey their confessor blindly.

When those people have once told in confession all the sins they have on their consciences, they must not think of them any more. They should take to heart, and look on as said specially to themselves, those words of the Wise Man: "Think of the Lord in goodness and seek Him in simplicity of heart; for He is found by them that tempt Him not; and He showeth Himself to them that have faith in Him."[1] As little children allow themselves to be ruled by their mothers, so they, too, must follow blindly the advice of their confessor. If he tells them that they are not to make a general confession, although they have never made one, they must obey; if he tells them even not to examine their conscience before confession, they must humbly obey him. And, in fact, if they who suffer from this spiritual malady do not submit humbly and obediently, without a word of complaint, to their ordinary confessor, they will never recover their spiritual health. Scruples arise from ignorance or from a melancholy disposition, or, as often happens, from the secret pride and obstinacy of those who are unwilling to submit their judgment to people who know more than they do; or else, they may arise from an inscrutable decree of God's Providence, who wishes to make us humble and to withdraw us from the vanities of the world. But

[1] Sentite de Domino in bonitate, et in simplicitate cordis quærite illum: quoniam invenitur ab his, qui non tentant illum, apparet autem eis, qui fidem habent in illum.—Wisd. i. 1, 2.

from whatever cause scruples arise, the souls that are affected with them cannot be helped unless they surrender their own judgment completely and with the greatest humility to that of their confessor, and obey him as little children do their parents.

Not every one whose conscience is uneasy is scrupulous.

I do not reckon amongst the scrupulous those who lead an idle, useless life, and easily fall into mortal sin, or are the occasion of others falling into it; nor those who do not try to fulfil the duties and obligations to which they are bound under pain of grievous sin; although, when such persons come to confession, they are scrupulous about many things that are not sinful at all, while they neglect or pay little attention to real sins, that they must avoid if they wish to amend their lives. What folly for a man who is sunk in vice to have a scruple about stepping on a cross of straw, or omitting his usual prayers or works of devotion, and so on! Scruples of that kind, my dear brethren, are like those of the high priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, who were afraid to enter the judgment-hall of Pilate, or to receive back from Judas the thirty pieces of silver, while they had not the least hesitation about suborning false witnesses, and glutting their hatred by condemning the innocent Son of God to a disgraceful death. Nor do I reckon as scrupulous those who associate freely with persons of the opposite sex, and dance and amuse themselves, while they allow full liberty to eyes, ears, hands, and all their senses, and, when they come to confession, are scrupulous as to whether they have consented to impure thoughts or actions. Eh? Scruples of that kind are very well founded, indeed! They are like the scruple of the peasant who said to his confessor: Father, there is something else that I have a scruple about. And what is it? I have stolen a horse. Oh, that is a fine, substantial scruple; I am not surprised that it should make you anxious! People of that kind have a very good reason for making a general confession, in order to amend their lives and to regain their peace of mind.

It is not advisable for those who have committed many sins of impurity to repeat their confessions.

Further, there are many who have lived in impurity for a long time, and have committed many sins through that horrible vice; for these the frequent repetition of such sins in a general confession would be not only useless and unnecessary, but even very dangerous. As St. John Climacus says: it would be like trying to extinguish a fire by throwing oil on it, or to drive away a hungry dog by giving him a piece of meat, which would only attract him all the more. Father Louis de Ponte com-

pares it to stirring up a noisome sink, the only effect of which is to create a foul odor. In the same way, the only effect of recalling sins of impurity is to give occasion to other unchaste thoughts and desires. Therefore, once such sins have been got rid of by a good general confession, they must be forgotten completely, and be buried in oblivion; nor should they ever be mentioned in confession again, unless in a general way; for instance, I am sorry for all the sins of my past life that I committed against holy purity; not a word more should be said about them. Other sins may be mentioned freely, if one wishes to do so (although that is not necessary, once a general confession of them has been made), and especially when one has to go to another confessor, that the latter may know the state of his penitent's conscience.

Exhortation to all who have not yet done so to make a general confession.

By way of conclusion, my advice to you, who have not yet made a general confession, is, to make one at once, and keep up the practice of making one every year, or, better and easier still, every half year, of all the sins that you have committed since your last general confession; and if you do that, you will be able to console yourselves at the end with the assurance that you have squared all your accounts with the almighty God. But, some will say, what is the use of going to so much trouble? I am not uneasy about my past confessions; I did what I could to make them well. So much the better for you that you have no apparent need of a general confession; still, you will find it of the greatest advantage in cleansing your conscience more thoroughly and giving you more peace of mind. Was it necessary for the pious king Ezechias to examine, as he did, his whole life? No, says Cornelius a Lapide; he did it out of devotion, and for the sake of greater security, thereby giving us an example, which we would do well to imitate. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul,"[1] says Ezechias, after he had been restored to health and strength. Take notice, says St. Bernard, that he does not say merely that he will think of his sins, but that he will recount them; that is, he is not satisfied with bewailing them once; but in the bitterness of his soul he will deplore all his sins one by one, and he will examine not merely the sins of one year, but also those of his whole life; "I will recount to Thee all my years." Ask St. John Chrysostom why St. Paul, the great Apostle of the gentiles, published his sins in the Epistle he wrote to his disciple Timothy: "Who

[1] Recogitabo tibi omnes annos meos in amaritudine animæ meæ.—Isa. xxxviii.15.

before was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and contumelious."[1] Was it necessary for him to make such a public confession? or did he still stand in need of pardon? But all his sins were forgiven in baptism, as he acknowledges in the same verse of the same Epistle: "But I obtained the mercy of God."[2] The reason of his doing so, says St. Chrysostom, was that he knew well the advantage to be derived from the sorrowful recollection and repeated confession of his sins. If St. Paul, who had the assurance of being forgiven, says St. Augustine, acted in that way, what should not the ordinary Christian do, who has not such an assurance? Ask St. Augustine himself why he published the confession of his sins, so that every one might read it. Was he obliged to do it? No, he says himself. "It is solely out of love for Thee, O Lord," he exclaims, "that I publish the iniquities of my life."[3] Let us, my dear brethren, imitate his example, in so far, at least, that we declare our sins secretly to one priest.

And not to allow themselves to be prevented from it by any deceit of the devil.

There is no doubt that the crafty tempter will try to put all kinds of difficulties in our way, to hinder us from making a general confession, because long experience has taught him that many souls are rescued from him by that means; but let us only begin bravely, and seriously undertake this work, that is so necessary for our souls. The day or two, so should each one think to himself, that I now subtract from my ordinary worldly occupations, will be the means of gaining great treasures for me, and of bringing me the greatest repose and security for my whole life, past as well as future. I shall come to know myself thoroughly, and shall be spurred on to serve God more zealously by the consideration of His extreme patience and long-suffering. I shall make the hour of my death one of consolation and joy for myself, by doing now what I shall then wish to have done. With the same weapons that the devil will then use to tempt me and try to drive me to despair, holding before me the terrors of the judgment, I shall now combat all my sins by accusing myself of them before the priest who is sitting in the sacred tribunal in the place of my future Judge. Yes, my Lord and my God, so shall it be, and that as soon as possible, since I do not know when death will arrive. "I will recount to Thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul," and will candidly declare in confession all my sins, as far as I can remember them! Do

[1] Qui prius blasphemus fui, et persecutor, et contumeliosus.—I. Tim. i. 13.
[2] Sed misericordiam Dei consecutus sum.—Ibid.
[3] Amore amoris tui facio istud, recolens vias meas nequissimas.

Thou only give me the necessary light and grace thereto! Mary, Mother of mercy and Refuge of sinners, help me by thy powerful intercession in this business, that is so advantageous for my soul! Holy guardian angel, allow me not to neglect it, leave me no peace nor rest until I have accomplished it well, that I may live in peace and die with the assurance of eternal happiness. Amen.

ON SATISFACTION AND DOING PENANCE AFTER CONFESSION.

THIRTY-FIFTH SERMON.

ON THE PENITENTIAL WORKS THAT THE SINNER OWES TO GOD AND TO HIMSELF.

Subject.

He who has sinned must do works of penance; this is required, 1. by what he owes to God; 2. by what he owes to himself.—*Preached on the first Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Non in commessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudicitiis, . . . sed induamini Dominum Jesum Christum. —Rom. xiii. 13, 14.

"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: . . . but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Introduction.

Our holy Mother, the Catholic Church, gives us a beautiful and salutary lesson in the words of to-day's Epistle, wherewith she instructs all her children how to prepare for the advent of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and future Judge. And what does she say? "It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep." Sinners, it is full time for you to awaken out of the deep sleep of sin by true penance. "Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light." But when we have so far done penance that we are freed from the slavery of sin, and have regained the grace of God, what must we do then? "Let us walk honestly as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities: but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," that is, live according to the example of Him who spent His life in constant humiliations, poverty,

watchings, fasting, and suffering; and, as the Apostle says immediately after, "make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscence;" you must chastise your flesh and mortify it by constant penance. And this is what I intend speaking of, my dear brethren, during this season of Advent, namely, that a true Christian must lead a penitential life, mortifying and crucifying himself. Why? We have sinned, and may sin again. We are living under a mortified and crucified God. An easy, luxurious life does not lead to heaven. Therefore we must do penance. The conclusion is evident. I shall consider the first reason to-day, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

He who has sinned must do penance; this is required by what he owes to God, whom he has offended: the first part. It is required by what he who has offended owes to himself: the second part.

O dear Saviour, who didst suffer for our sins, we implore Thee, by the merits of Thy Mother Mary and the intercession of our holy guardian angels, in the words of the Church, "that Thou wouldst vouchsafe to bring us to true penance, we beseech Thee to hear us."[1] Amen.

It is a heretical error to condemn works of penance.

It is a grievous error of heretics, who wish to avoid mortification, to condemn as unnecessary severities, derogatory to the honor of Jesus Christ, all works of penance and satisfaction, whether they are imposed in confession, or undertaken voluntarily. For, as Luther and his followers say, Christ has already fully atoned for all our sins, by offering to His eternal Father the inexhaustible treasure of His precious Blood, that He has shed for us, so that we shall not be required to suffer the least punishment; and to mortify and chastise ourselves for our sins is nothing else but to lessen and decry as invalid the merits of Jesus Christ. True penance consists only in the amendment of one's life; there is no need of sorrow or contrition for the sins we have committed, in order to obtain pardon of them from God; nor is there any necessity of mortification, fasting, or other bodily austerities, as long as we keep from sin; nay, provided we have but a firm faith that Christ, the Son of God, has suffered and died to atone for our sins, it is quite enough. What a grand idea that is, to escape anything that might give pain to the body!

Condemned by the

But this error has been long since condemned by the Catholic Church, especially in the Council of Trent. All the Fathers and

[1] Ut ad veram pœnitentiam nos perducere digneris, te rogamus, audi nos.

Doctors of the Church are opposed to this error, since they all exhort us, by voice and pen, to do penance. What is a sinner? asks Tertullian already in the first century of Christianity. He is one, he answers, who lives on earth in order to do penance, that is, to suffer, to deny himself, to mortify his senses and his sensuality, to chastise and crucify his flesh. St. Augustine says that there are three kinds of tribunals, in which God judges in different ways: in the first He shows nothing but mercy and goodness; and that is the sacrament of baptism, in which He so generously forgives all sins, no matter how great they may be in number or malice, that He receives the sinner fully into His grace and friendship, and, at the same time, remits all punishment due to sin, so that not the least obligation of atonement remains. In the second tribunal He will show nothing but His justice; and that will be at the end of the world, on the Last Day, in the general judgment, when there will be no longer place for mercy, and the sinner will be judged and condemned according to the strict measure of justice. In the third He shows justice, and mercy, too; and that is the holy sacrament of penance, in which the divine mercy, in consideration of the infinite merits and satisfaction of Jesus Christ, forgives the guilt of sin completely and forever, but in such a way that the divine justice reserves to itself certain rights that must be accorded it: God receives the sinner into His grace and friendship and lays aside the hatred and aversion He had conceived against him; but there still remains some temporal punishment due to sin, which has to be suffered.

Church and the holy Fathers.

And this is but right. If I offend a man like myself, and injure him in his honor and good name, or in his temporal concerns, to what am I bound? I acknowledge and confess humbly that I have done wrong, and I am sorry for it; I beg the man's pardon and promise that I will never offend him again; that is all right enough, but it is not sufficient. I am fully reconciled to him; moreover, he is determined, according to the Christian law, not to bear hatred or anger towards me for what I have done; that is a good and desirable thing for me, but it is not enough yet. The injury I have done his honor or his property must be repaired, even although I should myself suffer a grievous injury in doing so. It is the same with earthly tribunals; if the sovereign graciously pardons a malefactor condemned to death, he does not allow him to get off without suffering some punishment; for he is either sentenced to hard labor for a number of

The justice and necessity of penitential works shown by similes.

years, or else he is publicly scourged, or branded by the executioner, according to the nature and gravity of his crime. Sinner, do you know what you have done by consenting to grievous sin? You have with the greatest insolence attacked the infinite majesty of God, and offended and insulted Him; you have injured His honor and glory, which is the only good that He can receive from creatures, for you have despised Him, and, in His very presence, have trampled His commandments under foot. The sentence that was already pronounced on you was eternal damnation; but your life was spared, when you humbly confessed your sins and received sacramental absolution, so that you ought to be eternally grateful for the benefit bestowed on you. But gratitude is not enough; you must make reparation for the injured honor of God; you must satisfy the divine justice for the punishment that still remains due to your sins, either by bearing patiently the crosses and trials that God sends you, or by voluntary penances and mortifications in this life, or else you will have to suffer long and indescribable pains in purgatory. "There is no doubt," says St. Eucherius, "that God blots out sin when one repents of it; but He does not leave it unpunished; for, either man must punish himself for sin, or God will have to punish him."[1] Such also is the opinion of St. Gregory and St. Bernard.

Already in Paradise Adam saw the justice of this.

If we go back to the earliest times, we shall find men of the highest position acknowledging their obligation of doing penance after having committed sin. I will say nothing of the hair-shirts, which it is expressly stated that two kings, David and Joram, used; nor of the severe fasts, for which penitents are so often praised in Holy Scripture. When the world was still in its very cradle, so to speak, and there were only two sinners who had violated the divine law, they clearly saw the necessity of doing penance. Adam and Eve, our first parents, had hardly opened their eyes to see what they had been guilty of, when they tried to cover their nakedness, and to that end made for themselves a covering out of leaves, and, indeed, of the leaves of the fig-tree: "They sewed together fig-leaves, and made themselves aprons."[2] But, I ask, were there not in that paradise of delight other leaves, which would have served them better as covering? Why did they choose fig-leaves, which are hard and rough, and are more apt to torment the body than to clothe

[1] Procul dubio Deus delet peccatum; sed sine ultione non deserit: aut enim ipse homo in se punit, aut Deus percutit.—St. Eucher. in II. Kings viii.

[2] Consuerunt folia ficus, et fecerunt sibi perizomata.—Gen. iii. 7.

it? "It was precisely," answers St. Irenæus, "because they were rough, that our first parents chose them, in order thereby to show that he who has sinned, and has lost the grace of God, must wear a garment of penance, no matter how it is fashioned." "Adam," says the holy Father, "showed his penitential spirit by clothing himself with fig leaves, although there were many other leaves which would have been much more comfortable to wear; and he would have always worn this penitential garment, if God, in His mercy," who was satisfied with the future miseries that were in store for our first parents and their posterity, "had not made for them garments of skins, instead of the fig-leaves." [1]

And later on David.

David had sinned grievously, and repented of his sin so thoroughly and with so much contrition, that the Prophet Nathan, in the name of the Lord, assured him of forgiveness. Be comforted, David, he said to him, "The Lord also hath taken away thy sin, thou shalt not die." [2] Certainly, that was joyful news to him. But what followed? "Nevertheless, because thou hast given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, for this thing, the child that is born to thee shall surely die." [3] And all shall be fulfilled that I have foretold thee. "The sword shall never depart from thy house, because thou hast despised Me." [4] Famine, war, persecution, and other plagues shall come upon thee. Such was, so to speak, the penance enjoined on him by the Prophet, after he had acknowledged his sin. But David was not satisfied with that. Hear what he says himself of the penitential works, the weeping, watching, fasting, and bodily austerites that he voluntarily undertook, and persevered in during his whole life. "I am ready for scourges," he sighs, "and my sorrow is continually before me." [5] And why so? "For I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin," [6] for that sin by which I have offended Thee, O my God. The tears that he shed at night, during his constant watchings, were enough to water his bed. "Every night I will

[1] Ostendit Adam suam pœnitentiam, foliis ficulneis semetipsum contegens, existentibus et aliis foliis multis, quæ minus corpus ejus vexare potuissent; et hoc semper habuisset indumentum, nisi Dominus, qui est misericors, tunicas pelliceas præ foliis ficulneis induisset eos.—S. Iren. contra hær. Valent.

[2] Dominus quoque abstulit peccatum tuum: non morieris.—II. Kings xii. 13.

[3] Verumtamen quoniam blasphemare fecisti inimicos Domini, propter verbum hoc, filius qui natus est tibi, morte morietur.—Ibid. 14.

[4] Non recedet gladius de domo tua in sempiternum, eo quod despexeris me.—Ibid. 10.

[5] Ego in flagella paratus sum, et dolor meus in conspectu meo semper.—Ps. xxxvii. 18.

[6] Quoniam iniquitatem meam annuntiabo, et cogitabo pro peccato meo.—Ibid. 19.

wash my bed: I will water my couch with my tears." [1] His fasting was so severe that ashes were his food, and tears of contrition his drink. "I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping." [2]

The penance imposed in confession does not satisfy for the injury offered to God.

Sinful Christian, you know that you, too, have offended the great God; you know that you have often and grievously during your life transgressed His commandments; where is your penance for those sins? I have confessed them, you say. And is that enough? What satisfaction have you offered the divine justice for the injury done to it? I have performed the penance enjoined on me by the priest. Eh? And what sort of a penance was it? I have said a few decades of the Rosary, or some of the penitential psalms, or I have heard a Mass, or given a trifling alms to the poor, or have abstained from meat for one evening. Nothing more than that? But I am not bound to do any more. Truly, that is a fine way to pay what you owe to the almighty God! A magnificent satisfaction for ten, twenty, a hundred, or more mortal sins, or even for only one! A fine way to show your appreciation of the benefit by which God has freed you from the pains of hell! Where are the voluntary mortifications and penances that should justly follow the performance of the slight penance enjoined on you? I know nothing about them; my confessor said nothing of them to me. And do you think that a sufficient reason for doing nothing more? The penance that, for good reasons and according to the merciful disposition of the Catholic Church, is now enjoined in such slight measure in the sacrament of penance, is a different thing from that which the sinner should voluntarily take on himself, in order to atone for the insult he has offered to God.

What severe penances the saints inflicted on themselves.

O ye saints and great friends of God, is it really so easy to satisfy for sin? If so, then you have either deceived us by prescribing to us in your writings a far different manner of doing penance, or you have deceived yourselves and have done far too much, by mortifying yourselves most severely for slight faults, thinking you were bound to do so; or God must have been far more severe towards you than He is with us, and the satisfaction required for your sins must have far exceeded what He demands for ours. What would you think and say, my dear brethren, if I could give you a vivid representation of the contrite hearts and bodies worn out by hunger, thirst, watching, and all kinds

[1] Lavabo per singulas noctes lectum meum; lacrymis meis stratum meum rigabo.—Ps. vi. 7.

[2] Cinerem tanquam panem manducabam, et potum meum cum fletu miscebam.—Ps. ci. 10.

of austerities, of true penitents, in all ages of the Church? If I could describe to you the hair-shirts, the girdles with iron spikes, the disciplines with sharp knives and spurs, with which they often tortured their emaciated flesh, even to the shedding of blood? What would you say, if I could show you in the desert so many holy hermits, such as Paul, Antony, Hilarion, Pachomius, and others, who, for some faults committed through weakness, condemned themselves during their whole lives to unceasing and severe penance; who lived in holes and caves, among reptiles and wild beasts, hidden away from the light of day, their only food being roots and vegetables, thus following the exhortation of St. Paul, and bearing the mortification of Jesus Christ constantly in their bodies, in order to satisfy for their sins? What would you think if I could show you a Pope Marcellinus, who, on account of one sin that he had committed, abdicated the papal dignity, and ordered that his body should not be buried after his death, as he was not worthy of being on earth? Or a Victorinus, who, to punish himself for a sin of impurity, thrust his hand like a wedge into a cleft tree, and kept it there for a long time, to his exceeding great torture? Or a Maurice, who, because a child whom he was sent for to baptize happened to die before the sacrament was administered, on account of the length of time he took to say Mass, laid down the mitre, and served as a gardener for seven years? Or a Jacobonus, who had himself walled up in the tomb of the person with whom he had sinned carnally, and there consumed his life away in tears of repentance, with the corpse of his former accomplice rotting beside him? Or a Guarinus, who, after having committed a similar sin, crawled on his hands and knees, like a wild beast, to Rome, and, having confessed his sin to the Pope, returned to his solitude in the same manner, where he continued his strange mode of life until his body was entirely covered with hair, so that he was captured by some hunters as a monster, on which occasion a little infant miraculously cried out that God had forgiven his sin? Or a St. Francis Xavier, who tied ropes furnished with bristles so tightly around his feet and ankles, that they ate into the flesh and caused him intolerable pain; and this he did in punishment of some sins of vanity that he had formerly committed by dancing when in the world? What would you think if I could represent to you the customs of the early Christians, according to which penitents, without regard to sex or condition, had to prostrate themselves at the church door, allowing themselves to be trodden under foot by those who

came in or went out, and imploring their prayers with tearful voice? What, you would say, what was the meaning of that? It meant what it should mean, namely, that one must punish himself, or be punished, when he has offended God. It meant that he who has acted unlawfully must deny himself lawful pleasures. It meant that one must chastise himself for having sought sinful enjoyment, and thereby merited hell.

When we think of what they did, we must be ashamed of ourselves.

And we, who have committed similar, and perhaps more grievous sins, imagine that we can atone for them so easily, and without causing ourselves the least pain? A few pence given in charity must make up for twenty acts of injustice and theft; abstinence from meat on Friday and Saturday, for many sins of drunkenness and intemperance; a genuflection, for a hundred acts of impurity; a rosary, or some decades of it, or a few *Paters* and *Aves*, for numerous sins, so that we are not obliged to further atonement for them! We have been to confession, and have fulfilled the penance enjoined by the confessor, and thereby the justice of God is completely satisfied; we enjoy our sleep, we laugh and amuse ourselves, we eat and drink, and do what we please, just as if we had not committed any sin whatever. Fasting, bodily austerities, and hair-shirts are left to people who live in convents and monasteries; such mortifications are good enough for great sinners like them, but not for us, who live in the world; we have no need of them. A fine penance that! A fine way to restore the honor we have stolen from God. As if God had less claim on the children of the world on account of their sins, than on His own beloved servants. No, says St. Cyprian, speaking of all without exception, "the penance should not be less than the crime for which it is inflicted."[1] Every mortal sin deserves eternal punishment, and it is only just that a life-long penance should follow it. Perhaps some will think to themselves, I do not deny that I have deserved severe punishment, and I freely acknowledge that I am bound to make satisfaction to God for the insult I have offered Him; but I can manage that in another way, namely, by exciting myself to a deep sorrow when I think of my past sins, by often making an act of contrition, by gaining the indulgences granted by the Church, and by other meritorious good works. If I have recourse to means of that kind, I need not afflict my body. Besides, as long as sufficient atonement is made, it comes to the same thing in the end. How well you plead in favor of your body! In order to free it from all trouble,

[1] Pœnitentia crimine minor non sit.

you put the whole obligation of satisfaction on the soul alone, which has to suffer in order that the body may continue to enjoy its usual comforts. And this is the very idea I wish to combat, when I say that the body, too, must have its share in doing penance, and in satisfying for sin, as is required even by the duty you owe to yourself, as we shall see briefly in the

Second Part.

Not only the soul, but the body, too, must do penance. Shown by a simile.

What do you think, lawyers and judges? Yet I do not want you, after all, to express an opinion on this matter; for any one who has a little common sense can do so, although he has never studied law; what would you think of a case of this kind? Two robbers and murderers have been caught in the act and brought before the judge; a master and his servant, who have been companions in wickedness. After they both have been tried, the sentence is pronounced on them to this effect, that the master is to be broken on the wheel, while the servant is to be allowed to go scotfree. I ask even you, children, what you would think of that. Have not both committed the same crime? Why, then, should the master be punished, and the servant acquitted? And if, moreover, half the booty was given to the servant, and nevertheless he was allowed to go unpunished, would that be just? Nay, more, if the servant gets by far the greater part of the plunder, while the master has to be content with some miserable thing, is it right that the latter should bear all the punishment? Further still, if the master is misled by his servant, and tempted and solicited by him in the most importunate manner to commit a robbery, and if the servant actually shows his master the means of committing the crime, and threatens him with the most dreadful consequences in case he does not consent, so that the master, contrary to his own better knowledge and inclination, is forced to become the accomplice of his servant's guilt; if all these circumstances are brought out in the trial, and, in spite of them, the master alone is condemned to the wheel or the gallows, while the servant gets off free with his booty, who would not cry out against the injustice of such a sentence? Both are equally guilty, and both should suffer the same punishment. If the guilt of the one exceeds that of the other, so should his punishment also. And if any favor is to be shown to either, then the master should be let off free, while the wicked servant has to suffer what is due to him, since he alone is to be blamed for the crime, and, besides, he has carried off the

booty. Such would be the opinion of every sensible man in the matter.

For the body has its share in the sin.

Now to our subject, my dear brethren. Whenever a mortal sin is committed, then the honor and glory due to the divine Majesty, as we have seen already, is stolen away, and, moreover, a murder is committed, for, according to St. Paul, by mortal sin Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is again crucified. And who is guilty of this murder and theft? The human soul; for without its consent no sin can be committed. But it is not alone in wickedness; generally speaking, it has a companion; for the body with its outward senses must help in accomplishing the sinful action, inasmuch as the soul, while it is joined with the body, cannot even conceive a thought, unless it receives by the imagination, through the senses, the form with which to invest it. Now, if the sin is to be accomplished in outward act, it is the body that has to do it. So that both body and soul are caught in the very act of sin by the almighty God, brought before His judgment-seat, and there declared worthy of punishment. Which of the two must submit to the punishment? You maintain that the soul alone has to do penance and bewail its sins with bitter tears of sorrow. But what about the body? Is it to go free altogether, and enjoy its usual comforts? Is that just? If the body has its share in the guilt, why should the soul alone be condemned to suffer?

The body is deserving of more severe punishment, on account of its vile origin.

But perhaps it can boast of more noble descent than the soul, and of a more excellent nature; for sometimes in worldly tribunals a criminal is acquitted, or his punishment is lessened, on account of nobility or birth? Yet, do we not know that the body is most miserable in its origin? that it is made of dust and ashes, and that, without the soul, it is nothing but a sink of corruption and the food of worms? a fate that will eventually befall it, according to the words of God Himself: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"?[1] On this head alone should favor be shown to the soul, for it is an immortal and beautiful spirit, created to the image and likeness of God, that it may see and know its Maker; so that it is the lawful lord and master of the body, who must serve it as its obedient subject.

And generally it has the most advantage from sin.

Now, which of the two has the greater share of the plunder, when sin is committed? Which has the greater pleasure in the sinful act? The master, or the servant? The body or the soul? I grant that the latter has the satisfaction arising from inward

[1] Pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris.—Gen. iii. 19.

pride and vain honor. As to envy and jealousy, no pleasure comes from it to either, although it generally arises from a fear that the happiness of others will detract somewhat from our bodily well-being. All other vices, no matter what they are called, are directed to procuring for the body some sensual gratification, or warding off from it something unpleasant and disagreeable, that it may enjoy itself, eat, drink, and sleep well, be well clad and comfortably housed, and have nothing to suffer, that eyes, ears, tongue, hands, taste, smell, and touch may have the delights they long for. For that reason people commit all kinds of sins of impurity; they even stain their souls by unchaste thoughts and desires; they hesitate at no acts of injustice and deceit; they wallow in gluttony and drunkenness, and sin by extravagance in dress, and by carelessness and sloth in the divine service; while, if anything happens to interfere with the pleasure and convenience of the body, they give way to anger and hatred, to enmity and vindictiveness, to cursing and swearing. In a word, it is, generally speaking, for the sake of the body and its senses that God is abandoned and despised, that the precious soul is ruined, and the joys of heaven forfeited, while the soul has the very least share of the advantage, and the greatest of the injury and malice resulting therefrom. Now, when sin has been committed, divine justice demands that some temporal punishment should be suffered, in order to satisfy it; and this burden is placed on the soul alone. What justice or right is there in that?

It is almost the only instigator and occasion of sin.

Finally, if the instigator of a robbery or murder has not the least claim to mercy, and deserves the severest punishment, how can the body be spared, when there is question of satisfying for sin? For it alone not only shows the soul how to sin, and gives it occasion thereto, but continually coaxes and impels it, forces it, so to say, to consent to its desires. Would so many sins be committed against holy purity, if the eyes did not act as traitors, and lead the mind to unchaste desires by wanton glances? Would so many sins be committed against the love of our neighbor, if the ears were not open to uncharitable discourse, if the tongue knew how to restrain itself from defaming others? Would so many sins be committed against temperance, if the mouth and palate were satisfied with the necessary food and drink? But what need is there of further proof? "From whence are wars and contentions among you?" asks the Apostle St. James: "Are they not hence? from your concupiscences, which

war in your members?"[1] How St. Paul complains of this when he writes to the Romans: "For the good which I will, I do not: but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . . For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is, in my members."[2]

As we know from experience.

We have, alas, sad experience of this in ourselves. Although reason has received from God such authority over the body that the latter cannot open an eye, or move hand or foot, without the consent of the will, yet the flesh refuses obedience, and obstinately declines to hearken to the command of the reasoning will. Holy hermits, go and conceal yourselves in the caverns and dens of wild beasts; you take your bodies with you wherever you go, and they will give you enough to do, so that you will frequently hardly be able to resist their importunity! St. Jerome used to beat his breast with a stone; St. Bernard threw himself into a frozen pond, and St. Benedict rolled about in thorns, in order to subdue the flesh; even St. Paul, that vessel of election, after having uttered those bitter complaints, sighs forth: "Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"[3]

Therefore the body must do penance, or be punished by God.

And yet, when the poor soul has been wearied out in the struggle, and consents to sin, and the question arises as to who must atone for the injury offered to God, sentence is at once pronounced against the soul, which, by its contrition and sorrow, has to make up for everything, while the reckless instigator of all the evil, the body, is allowed to rest and enjoy itself, and seek its comfort without the least restraint. Reason, where art thou? Is that right? No; the body should do penance also. And woe to us, if we allow it to go unpunished; for, if the soul is satisfied with that, and it is used to concede too much to the body in this life, yet the just God will not permit the body to be without its share of suffering. He has still in His power a countless number of diseases, which He can send to afflict the sinful flesh; He has an unlimited number of misfortunes at hand, which He can inflict, as forerunners of judgment, at any moment, avenging

[1] Unde bella, et lites in vobis? nonne hinc? ex concupiscentiis vestris, quæ militant in membris vestris?—James iv. 1.

[2] Non enim quod volo bonum, hoc facio: sed quod nolo malum, hoc ago. . . Condelector enim legi Dei secundum interiorem hominem; video autem aliam legem in membris meis, repugnantem legi mentis meæ, et captivantem me in lege peccati, quæ est in membris meis!—Rom. vii. 19, 22, 23.

[3] Infelix ego homo, quis me liberabit de corpore mortis hujus?—Ibid. 24.

Himself by plaguing the body with poverty and hunger; nor is He without innumerable crosses and trials, with which to contradict at pleasure the desires of the flesh; while death is always ready to do His bidding, and to take away husband, wife, child, or dear friend, thus depriving life of all its joys and consolation; and, finally, there is the fire of the next life, in which He can exact full satisfaction.

Conclusion and exhortation to do penance.

Therefore, sinner, let us take the safest part, and anticipate the divine punishments by voluntary mortifications. "What you have done," says St. Augustine, "cannot remain unpunished;"[1] and wherein a man has sinned, he shall also be chastised; so that "you must either punish yourself, or God will punish you."[2] And if you leave it to Him, woe betide you; for it will be meted out to you with the utmost severity. "If you wish to avoid the divine chastisements, then chastise yourself."[3] There is no doubt that prudence teaches us to choose the lesser of two evils. A single slight mortification of the eyes, abstinence from some food or drink that we are fond of, standing or kneeling for an hour, or something of the kind that we voluntarily undertake, is of more value in the sight of God, as far as the satisfying for our sins is concerned, than severe punishments, that we must suffer against our will. We can now choose, and select what penance we please; if we wait for God's avenging arm, we know not what may befall us, and may be compelled to suffer what will cause us the greatest pain with the least merit. What penitential works we can make choice of, and how we are to perform them, we shall see, my dear brethren, on another occasion; they will not be so severe as some may, perhaps, imagine. For the present, I conclude with the words of St. John Chrysostom and of St. Paul. "That we may not be punished," says the former, "let us chastise ourselves with tears of contrition, with fasting, and other bodily mortifications."[4] "For, as you have yielded your members," writes the Apostle to the Romans, "to serve uncleanness and iniquity unto iniquity, so now yield your members to serve justice unto sanctification."[5] As you have abused the members of your body to offend God, so now make the same members serve as instruments to render due satisfaction to the divine

[1] Illud quod fecisti, impunitum esse non potest.

[2] Aut punis, aut punit. [3] Vis non puniat, puni tu.

[4] Ne pœnas demus, unusquisque seipsum affligat lacrymis, jejuniis, etc.

[5] Sicut enim exhibuistis membra vestra servire immunditiæ, et iniquitati, ad iniquitatem; ita nunc exhibete membra vestra servire justitiæ, in sanctificationem.—Rom. vi. 19.

justice. Think and say with me: yes, O my God, I will do penance; it is only just and right that I should; I owe it to Thee and to myself! I will satisfy Thy justice, which I have so often and so monstrously offended by my sins; and I will satisfy it by this body of mine, which I have so often and so wantonly abused to sin against Thee. Do not dare, O flesh, to oppose this resolution of mine! The penance will last but a short time, and eternal joys will be the result. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the first Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum jejunasset quadraginta diebus et quadraginta noctibus, postea esuriit.—Matt. iv. 2.

"When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards He was hungry."

Introduction.

That I can readily believe. It must certainly make one hungry to fast forty days and nights at a stretch, without tasting anything. Christians, which of us could do that? Ah, what a great difficulty we sometimes make of fasting a few days, and that not a complete fast, but merely eating one meal a day! No; there are many who could not even do that much. And, therefore, people look on the Lent with horror, as if it were a dreadful kind of spectre, and think that they must make merry for nearly forty days beforehand, in order to prepare for it. Poor mortals that we are! And yet we are not so badly off, for we are allowed to eat meat now, and that takes a heavy load off the hearts of many! I wish them joy! But they must not forget that all confessors and others who have the charge of souls are told to exhort them to make up for this dispensation by other works of penance. And that is but right and just. Therefore I, too, in order to satisfy my obligation, will commence at once with a similar exhortation, and will show that every good Christian is bound at all times, and much more in this penitential season, to lead a life of penance and to mortify himself. And why so? We have sinned, etc.—*Continues as before.*

THIRTY-SIXTH SERMON.

ON DOING PENANCE IN PROSPERITY AND IN ADVERSITY.

Subject.

1. What kind of penitential works they who live in prosperity can and must perform. 2. What kind is to be performed by those who suffer adversity.—*Preached on the third Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Tu quis es?—John i. 19.
"Who art thou?"

Introduction.

Truly, a most useful question. "Who art thou?" If every one asked himself that question daily, and answered it according to his conscience, what wholesome and salutary effects it would have! Who art thou? Are you a sinner who have offended your God? How many of us, my dear brethren, could say with truth, like St. John the Baptist, that we are not sinners? Would not the greater number of us have to confess humbly that we have often and (as is the case with many) grievously sinned? Now, if you are a sinner, do you know what you have to do? You must do penance; not merely the penance which consists in repenting of and declaring your sins in confession, but you must endeavor, in the spirit of contrition, to make some atonement to God for the injuries offered Him, and to chastise the wantonness of your flesh, which was the instigator and occasion of your sins, as I showed in the last sermon. But, you ask, how are we to manage that so as not to do too little, nor too much? Before answering that question, I must ask each one of you: "Who art thou?" Are you a prosperous man, who can live in comfort, or are you poor and in adversity, so that you have many crosses and trials to contend with? I shall answer both in this sermon.

Plan of Discourse.

What kind of penitential works they who live in prosperity can and must perform; this I shall explain in the first and longer part. What kind of penitential works they who suffer adversity can and must perform, I shall show in the second part.

That both may perform what they can and should do in this respect, we beg of Thy grace, O Lord, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

If severe bodily austerities were required of us:

There are some people who, when they hear of chastising the flesh, immediately picture to their imaginations all kinds of fearful penances, such as the saints practised, who treated themselves with the greatest apparent hatred and cruelty. Their ears tingle with the sound of the disciplines armed with heavy knots or sharp spurs; they seem to hear the rattling of the iron chains, and to feel the blows of the cruel scourges with which those innocent servants of God chastised themselves until the blood flowed from them in streams. Others close their eyes, lest they should see the hair-shirts, furnished with sharp iron points, or the iron girdles, which the saints used to wear the whole day long. Others, again, cannot conceal their disgust at fasting on bread and water, and depriving their bodies of all nourishment, as they think they would be obliged to do. Or they tremble at the idea of having to sleep on the bare boards, with a stone for a pillow, or of having to wear shoes with the souls cut off, so as to cover the upper part of the foot, and yet expose them to all the hardship of walking barefoot in processions and pilgrimages; or they shudder at the thought of being obliged to make several genuflections one after the other, until they are worn out with fatigue; and so on for other corporal austerities.

We should have just reason for performing them.

But, my dear brethren, if such things were really expected of us, what could we urge against them? Would the divine justice be exacting too much satisfaction for the grievous injuries we have offered it? Would the punishment be too severe for the wanton flesh, which has revolted against reason, and so often merited hell-fire for the sake of indulging in its forbidden pleasures? Would it be too much to do in order to escape the tedious torments of purgatory? Or too great a price to pay for the indescribable, eternal joys of heaven, which, according to the testimony of Our Lord, suffers violence, and is borne away only by the violent, who deny and crucify themselves? Would it be too much to do for a God who was crowned with thorns? For a God whose whole body was torn with scourges? whose hands and feet were pierced with nails? who suffered all the torments of hunger and thirst, and whose only refreshment was vinegar and gall? who died a public and shameful death on the cross, and all that in order to atone for the sins of others, an atonement which He freely and voluntarily

took on Himself to offer? Does not the holy Apostle, St. Paul, exhort us to follow Our Lord's example? "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies. For we who live, are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake."[1]

Many put forward, to no purpose, as an excuse, their bodily weakness.

I know well that the fastidious flesh will turn away in disgust from all these penitential exercises, and will relegate them to the deserts, for the use of pious hermits, whose lives people are inclined to admire, but not to imitate. It will try to excuse itself by appealing to its weakness and delicacy, which render it unable to undertake such austerities; or to the fear of injuring its health, and thus shortening its life, which we are bound, by the law of God, to preserve for His service. Alas, how greatly we are to be pitied, and how readily we find pretexts to spare our bodies! I do not mean to say that all, without exception, should practise austerities of the kind I have mentioned; but, on the other hand, the pretext alleged on the score of weakness and delicacy does not avail every one.

For they can mortify themselves enough for the sake of the world and the flesh.

Do we think so much of our weakness and delicacy when there is question of satisfying our impure passions, or of otherwise enjoying ourselves? Oh, no; we are strong enough for that! we are not afraid of wind or weather on such occasions, nor do we hesitate to spend whole nights dancing and amusing ourselves, so that we can hardly drag one foot after the other the next day, and yet we do not fear any injury to our health. What efforts, far more trying to the bodily health than mortifications endured for the purpose of satisfying for sin, what efforts, I say, are not made to please others, to satisfy the claims of vanity, and to follow the customs of the world! Here I have before my mind the numbers of people who drink to excess, even against their will, and thus sow the seeds of many a disease, solely for the sake of the company in which they are. They never think of their health then. I consider the number of women and girls, who pretend to be most delicate, and therefore will not hear a word of mortification, who actually torture themselves (would that they did as much for God's sake), in order to follow the fashion, with tight lacing and narrow shoes, so that every step must be a torment to them, their teeth chattering meanwhile from the cold, on account of the low-necked dresses

[1] Semper mortificationem Jesu in corpore nostro circumferentes, ut et vita Jesu manifestetur in corporibus nostris. Semper enim nos, qui vivimus, in mortem tradimur propter Jesum.—II. Cor. iv. 10, 11.

they wear in the depth of winter. If they only gave themselves that much trouble for the sake of satisfying for their sins and going to heaven! But they do it solely to please men; and they are not the least afraid of injuring their health thereby, or of overtasking their strength. And yet these very people say that they cannot abstain a little now and then from food and drink, in order to satisfy for their sins; nor can they bear to wear a penitential girdle, or to suffer the least inconvenience or cold, to atone for their sins, although they bear far more for the sake of following the fashions; nor does their health allow them to rise a little earlier in the morning, I will not say to deprive themselves of sleep during the night, in order to praise God. Oh, no; they are too delicate for that, and their health would suffer too much from it. Such is the way of the world. We have health and strength enough for vice and vanity, but we are too delicate to practise penance and mortification; as if what Jesus Christ Himself says of the rough way of the Cross were but a fable.

Yet the same mortifications are not required from every one.

Yet, in order not to frighten all idea of penance out of your heads (for there are not many of you who would listen to, or believe me, if I were to insist on the necessity of great austerities; in this matter every one is not so docile as that simple-minded peasant, who meant well, indeed, towards his God, and who said to me once after confession: "Father, I have not a discipline like those the Lenten preachers use, so that I have to beat myself now and then with the chain that I tie up my cow with; will that do?" "Excellently," I answered; "but take care not to break your ribs." Ludicrous as the incident was, the simplicity of the man and his desire to do penance forced me to shed tears), I repeat that I have mentioned those great austerities, not to exhort or advise all, without exception, to practise them. No; for even the holiest and greatest penitents have not always made use of them, nor have they employed them all at once. In this, as in other matters, reason and common sense must have their say, in order to avoid doing too much as well as too little. Different people require different penances; one must mortify himself in the time of temptation, another, when he enjoys interior peace; and the penance that can be employed now and then with great profit would lose all its value, if employed constantly.

How one can easily mortify the

There are easier ways of doing penance and mortifying and restraining the outward senses as well as the inward inclinations, which no one can reasonably find fault with, or excuse himself

from practising. They are not very difficult, nor do they cause the body much suffering; and yet they are of the greatest use in atoning for sin and gaining merit, especially when they are practised habitually from a good motive. A penance of this kind would be, for instance, to hold one's eyes fixed on the ground for a certain time, and not to look at some pleasing object. There is a person whom I would willingly look at; my eyes open of themselves to see him; but at once I turn them away, or close them, saying to myself, for Thy sake, O God, I will refrain from looking at what would give me pleasure. The holy youth Aloysius, of our Society, was for three whole years a page in the service of Mary of Austria, queen of Spain, who was looked on as a miracle of beauty, and he had to be in her presence daily; but he never as much as knew her by sight, and when he was asked how she looked, he had to answer candidly that he could not tell, as he had never seen her. I happen to hear a noise in the street; my first inclination is to run to the window to see what it is about; but suddenly I restrain myself, and make up my mind not to look out, in order to mortify myself for God's sake. And the same may be said of other things that we willingly look at. St. Francis Borgia, while he was still in the world as duke of Gandia, used frequently to mortify himself in that way; he was passionately fond of hawking, and often, when the hawk was on the point of seizing its prey, he would turn away his eyes, in order to make a sacrifice to God of the pleasure he would have had in looking at what was the most interesting part of the sport. sense of sight.

There is also sensual pleasure in hearing, smelling, and speaking, which one can mortify. I am anxious to hear something, but I restrain myself; or, if something is being told in my presence, I try to divert my attention, so as not to understand the subject of conversation. There is a beautiful flower in the garden; my hand is already stretched out to pluck it, but, for God's sake, I overcome myself, and let it be. I have a fine opportunity to give a sharp answer, but I mortify myself and hold my tongue. I have a great dislike for a certain person, and cannot bear to be in his company; but I do violence to myself, and speak to him in a friendly manner, although very much against my inclination. I go to visit a poor sick man, as the Christian law exhorts me, and, in spite of my natural repugnance, I attend to his wants and make his bed. And so on. Such penitential works as these, my dear brethren, do not cost a drop of blood, nor cause pain to any member of the body; they appear very trifling and insignifi- Of hearing, smelling, and speech.

cant, and not beyond the strength of a child; yet you may be assured that they are of great importance in the sight of God, and the habit of practising them is a sign of no mean virtue. They attract no notice, and demand no great effort; but they atone for sin better sometimes than daily fasting or a severe discipline.

Taste.

With regard to the sense of taste, if, beyond the ordinary fast days, one cannot, or will not suffer hunger or thirst, there are yet plenty of opportunities of overcoming one's self. For instance, by not tasting an apple or some other delicacy that comes in one's way outside of meal times; by standing up from table, before being fully satisfied; by not using salt or other condiments with articles of food that are insipid without them, as many frequently, though not always, do, not without gaining a great victory over themselves; by either abstaining completely from a certain thing that one is fond of, or at least by allowing the best bits of it to remain untasted; by not eating or drinking at once when one is suffering from hunger or thirst, but waiting a few minutes, as long, for instance, as one takes to say the "Miserere," although one has the food or drink in his hand. Oh, certainly, a mortification of that kind is most acceptable to God!

After the example of David and others.

King David showed great bravery and fearlessness when he attacked the giant Goliath with his shepherd's sling, and cut off his head; but, according to the testimony of the holy Fathers, he gained a still greater victory when he poured the water out on the ground, as we read in the Second Book of Kings. He was leading his army against the Philistines, when the heat of the day and the numerous cares that oppressed him caused him to suffer from violent thirst and exhaustion, so that he cried out: "Oh, that some man would give me drink of the water out of the cistern, that is in Bethlehem by the gate."[1] Three of his bravest soldiers had hardly heard this wish of their king, when they came to the resolution of fulfilling it. There was no way for them to get at the cistern, but to break through the enemies' camp. This they did with the greatest heroism, filled a vessel with the water of the cistern, and brought it to the king. David, who was looking out for them eagerly, at once grasped the vessel, and was about to raise it to his lips, when he suddenly looked up to heaven and, with unexampled heroism, poured the coveted water on the ground without tasting it: "But he would not drink," says the holy Scripture, "but offered it to the Lord."[2]

[1] O si quis mihi daret potum aquæ de cisterna, quæ est in Bethlehem juxta portam.—II. Kings xxiiii. 15.

[2] At ille noluit bibere, sed libavit eam Domino.—Ibid. 16.

Thus he sacrificed to God the refreshment that he could have taken without sin, nay, that was almost necessary to him under the circumstances. St. Gregory takes the trouble of investigating the reason which induced David to overcome himself so heroically, and he thinks he has found it when he says, David remembered that he had formerly given way far too much to his sensual appetites, and had conceded too much to them, when he committed the horrid crime of adultery; and, in order to do something to wipe out that disgrace, and to make some atonement for having offended God, he came to the heroic resolution of sacrificing a pleasure and a refreshment that was not only lawful for him, but even necessary, at least in appearance. "Because he remembered that he had acted unlawfully," says the Saint, "he wished to abstain even from lawful enjoyments."[1] Mark these words, my dear brethren; he whose conscience reproaches him with having indulged too much in sensual pleasures during his youth, or later on in life, so that he has sinned like David, or even worse, now, that he understands the matter more clearly, should use the same severity to himself, and abstain frequently from pleasures that are innocent, lawful, and remote from all danger of offending God. For it is but right that he should now practise self-restraint on the narrow path of virtue, and serve God zealously, since he formerly gave a loose rein to his passions on the broad road that leads to destruction. Plutarch writes of Socrates, who was a heathen, that when he was thirsty, and came to a spring of water, he always used to empty the vessel that he had filled in order to quench his thirst, before drinking, so as to exercise some restraint on his inclination, because the light of reason alone was sufficient to show him that a man must be master of his desires. How much more reason, then, has not a Christian to practise a similar mortification of his senses, in order to make some reparation for the insult he has offered the great God by sin?

How easy it is to chastise the body.

Finally, with regard to the chastisement of the body, if the severe penances of the saints inspire us with horror and fear, why should we not make up our minds to stand for an hour to hear the word of God in a sermon, although it seems to us rather an uncomfortable position? And more especially should we do so, if we come late, and cannot find a seat. I know very well that there are ladies and gentlemen who think that an excessive

[1] Quia se illicita perpetrasse meminerat, voluit etiam a licitis abstinere.

inconvenience, and who, to avoid it, remain away from a sermon that would perhaps be of more use to them than hearing Mass or going to holy Communion; but when there is question of going to the theatre, or seeing a great man enter the town in public procession, they can stand for hours without complaining. Why should we not, now and then, look out for an uneven piece of wood, or a stone, and kneel on it for a while, in order to pray to God while practising that slight mortification? And in the evening, before going to bed, could we not pray for a short time with outstretched arms, when there is no one to see us, or prostrate ourselves on the ground, kissing it in sign of humility and of our sincere acknowledgment that, since we have offended God, we are not worthy to be on the earth? Could we not occasionally curtail our sleep in the morning by half an hour or so, in order to be present at the public devotions, or to hear a sermon? And again, there are many who, through fear of such a mortification, lose many a grace that would be the greatest advantage to their souls. Every day we have opportunities of mortifications of that kind. For instance, in the morning, when we awake, instead of delaying to get up, and turning round from one side to the other, persuading ourselves that we do not want to sleep, but only to lie still for a time, we should rise at once, and thus begin the day with an act of mortification, sacrificing for God's sake that pleasure of a few moments. Believe me, my dear brethren, it requires frequently a great amount of self-denial to deprive one's self of even a few moments' rest in that way; the pleasure it takes away from the body is very small, but the gain to the soul is great. Try it, and you will see. Another opportunity of daily mortification is offered us by the change of the weather; it is either too harsh and windy, or too cold and rainy, or too hot and sweltering. Oh, there are only too many who are so delicate that they neglect church and sermon, because it is too cold, or the sun is too hot; they must think they are made of butter, and that the cold in winter will turn them into ice, while the heat in summer will melt them! Is it too much to bear patiently with an inconvenience of that kind, which no one can avoid, and to offer it to God in atonement for our sins? Again, flies and other insects sometimes trouble us; if you wish to do penance, wait as long as it would take to say the Our Father, before driving them away; you need not be afraid that they will sting you to death. Only try it. In a word, mortification and self-denial consist in doing

what one dislikes, and abstaining from what one is fond of. He who loves God truly will find many an occasion of atoning for his sins in these and countless similar manners.

Exhortation to have recourse to those mortifications, in order to make reparation to God for having insulted Him.

All that I have said on this subject amounts to this: he who has sinned must do penance, and not treat his flesh too delicately, but often deprive it of even lawful pleasures and enjoyments, since he has indulged in forbidden pleasures, contrary to the will of God. Curious eyes and ears, talkative and defamatory tongue, unchaste and unjust hands, wanton and dissolute flesh, what else are ye but arms with which wickedness makes war on the Most High? St. Paul warns us against that abuse of them: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of iniquity unto sin."[1] What is more just than to use them in the contrary sense, and to turn them against those who have offended God? "Present yourself to God," continues the Apostle, "as those that are alive from the dead; and your members as instruments of justice unto God,"[2] which is done by those who make war on themselves. If you still find it too difficult to practise constant mortification of the senses in the manner described, then do like the debtor who is not able to pay at once all he owes; every day he subtracts something from his unnecessary household expenses; to-day a shilling, to-morrow another, and so on, until he has the necessary sum together. In the same way you should select for each day one or other of the mortifications I have described: to-day you can mortify your eyes, to-morrow your mouth, and the day after some other sensual desire. Say, with the servant in the Gospel who was unable to pay the ten thousand talents he owed his master: "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all;"[3] little by little the whole debt shall be paid off. Thus the body must learn that there is a God in heaven, whom it has grievously offended; that there is in it a soul that has to command it, and that the comforts and refreshments that are conceded to it in this life do not belong to it by right, but are merely given to it now and then, out of pure generosity. Penance is necessary for all, even for those repentant sinners who have trials to contend with, as we shall see briefly in the

[1] Sed neque exhibeatis membra vestra arma iniquitatis peccato.—Rom. vi. 13.

[2] Exhibete vos Deo, tanquam ex mortuis viventes: et membra vestra arma justitiæ Deo.—Ibid.

[3] Patientiam habe in me, et omnia reddam tibi.—Matt. xviii. 26.

Second Part.

Most people complain of the trials they have to bear.

Ah, I seem to hear some sighing forth now, and do you expect us also to do penance? God help us! we have penance enough! We are so poor that we must beg our bread from door to door; is not that sufficient? We suffer in secret the pangs of hunger and thirst with our children, and for shame dare not beg; is not that penance enough? I, says another, have been for a number of years in bed with a grievous illness, and cannot even get up to go to church; is not that penance enough? I am never free from head-ache, which prevents me from sleeping at night: the whole winter I have a severe cough; I am subject to all kinds of pains and aches; do I not suffer enough for my sins? From morning till night, says the laborer, I must be at work, in order to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow; is not that penance enough? We poor peasants have to bear the heat and burden of the day, and the piercing cold of winter, while our food is of the poorest description; is not that penance enough for us? Are not the constant cares and troubles of the married state sufficient punishment for the sins that we married people commit? Is it not hard enough to have a house full of little children, who must be looked after night and day? to have to do with obstinate and disobedient, or sickly and delicate children? to have to live with a passionate, ill-tempered, drunken husband, who beats me if I say a word to him, or with a discontented, peevish, idle, or extravagant wife? Is it not penance enough to have to bear with a brother or sister, who worries me the whole day long, and who is full of faults? Is it not penance enough to have to run up and down from morning till night, and yet not succeed in pleasing my master or mistress? Is it not hard enough to be deprived of father and mother, and to have to submit to persecution and ill-treatment as a poor orphan? Wherever we turn, we find crosses and trials; are they not penance enough? Must we chastise our bodies in the bargain? Must we. . . . Enough, enough; I quite believe you; and I know that if I began to dispute with you, I should get the worst of it.

These trials can serve as penances, if they are borne willingly and meritoriously.

No, dear Christians, it is not my intention to inflict new torments on you by way of penance; for there is no doubt that all you have to suffer is a punishment of sin, such as was decreed against us by the Almighty God in the sentence He pronounced on Adam and Eve when they disobeyed His command in Paradise: "I will multiply thy sorrows. . . in sorrow shalt thou bring forth children. . . cursed is the earth in thy work; with

labor and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. . . in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread."[1] Therefore I freely acknowledge that you have often enough to suffer. But there is one thing you must not forget; there is a great difference between suffering and suffering. To have to endure labor and trouble, care and vexation, and to suffer hunger and thirst, crosses and misery, is not always to do penance. Otherwise even horses and beasts of burden would do penance, for they often have to work hard, and to bear hunger and thirst and cruel treatment. Cain was sent into banishment and misery, and yet he did not do penance. The impenitent thief hung on the cross, and died as well as Christ; but he did not do penance. To suffer without the proper motive is not to atone for sin, while to suffer with impatience and murmuring, instead of being an atonement for sin, is rather collecting new material for penance, and adding to our punishment. For suffering to be available as an atonement for our sins, we must suffer willingly and with a proper motive.

How to bear them willingly and meritoriously.

And what is the meaning, you ask, of suffering willingly? Must we, then, inflict some other torment on ourselves, after all, in addition to the trials we have to bear already? for it is not of our own choice that we have to endure those trials; they came to us without being invited; it is our ill luck that we have them, and if we could we would gladly get rid of them. And I believe you, too; but you must make a virtue of necessity, and by patience, contentment, and a good intention make that voluntary on your part, which at first happened against your will and appeared hard and disagreeable to you. Then those trials will be accepted by God as an atonement for your sins, as the Council of Trent expressly teaches. "So generously does God act towards us," such are the words of the Council, "that we can satisfy God the Father, through Jesus Christ, for our sins, not only by performing voluntary penances, or the satisfaction imposed on us by the priest in confession, but also by patiently bearing the temporal chastisements inflicted on us by God."[2] What it is to suffer patiently I have explained on a former occasion. It is not impatience to experience sorrow and vexation; it is that which makes the cross, and we must experience it. Contentment does

[1] Multiplicabo ærumnas tuas. . . in dolore paries filios. . . maledicta terra in opere tuo; in laboribus comedes ex ea cunctis diebus vitæ tuæ. . . in sudore vultus tui vesceris pane.—Gen. iii. 16, 17, 19.

[2] Sed etiam temporalibus flagellis a Deo inflictis, et a nobis patienter toleratis, apud Deum Patrem per Christum Jesum satisfacere valeamus.—Trid. sess. xiv. c. 9.

not reside in the sensitive part of the soul, nor in the outward senses, nor in the imagination or fancy; for it is quite evident that our natural inclinations are opposed to everything disagreeable. Contentment and patience are seated in the reasoning will, with which we accept that which is disagreeable, and are satisfied with being annoyed, troubled, and tormented, because such is the will of God.

Instruction as to how one can and ought to do penance in that way.

Do you wish, then, to do voluntary and meritorious penance by those trials, which you have to suffer in any case, and cannot avoid? If so, you must think and say humbly, with the Prophet David, who cried out, when he remembered his sin and the punishment he was threatened with for it, "I am ready for scourges... I will declare my iniquity, and I will think for my sin:" [1] that I may atone for it: O Lord, I am ready for Thy fatherly chastisements; I acknowledge that I have deserved what I now suffer, and much more! And with the good thief on the cross, when he was reproving his wicked companion, "we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." [2] And again with St. Bernard, who said to his body, when it objected against his severe penances, "why do you murmur, miserable flesh? why do you object?" [3] Think of what you have done to offend your God; you have had your pleasure already, now is the time for you to be visited with sickness and afflictions, and it serves you perfectly right. If you, O hands, have to labor hard, it is only right that you should do so, as a punishment for the sins of impurity you have committed. If you, O eyes, now weep, if you, heart, are oppressed with sorrow, it serves you right, for those unchaste glances and thoughts you have indulged in. You, too, O head, must suffer for those proud and vain thoughts. Your long-continued and painful tooth-ache, O mouth, is a just return for your frequent fault-finding and detraction, for your cursing and swearing. If you, O body, have to put up with hunger, thirst, and poverty, it is all you have a right to expect for your former intemperance. Bear the heavy cross that your husband, or wife, or ill-reared children lay on your shoulders: it is a meet reward for the sins you committed in the married state. If the members of your body, that you abused to offend God, are tortured now, it is but what you deserve; for your sins have merited hell. Eternal poverty, hunger,

[1] Ego in flagella paratus sum... iniquitatem meam annunciabo, et cogitabo pro peccato meo.—Ps. xxxvii. 18, 19.

[2] Nos quidem juste, nam digna factis recipimus.—Luke xxiii. 41.

[3] Quid adhuc murmuras, misera caro? quid adhuc recalcitras?

thirst, vexation, pain, and despair should be your lot; but now God is willing to accept in atonement for your sins the crosses you have to bear. Can you complain of that? Have you not rather reason to look on it as a great favor? Oh, if one of the lost souls could escape eternal torments by bearing such trials, he would gladly suffer, not merely what you have to suffer, but also all the torments and trials of all men, to the Day of Judgment, and would, moreover, humbly kiss the chastising hand of God with gratitude. O my good and loving God, what thanks do I not owe Thee, for having enabled me to escape the pains of hell, which I have deserved, by bearing such slight trials for such a short time! Yes, O Lord, may Thy holy name and Thy goodness be forever blessed! I will readily suffer, however, whatever and as long as Thou wilt! That is the way to make voluntary the sufferings that God sends us against our will, and to do penance by means of them, although we do not accept one of them with our own inclination.

Conclusion and exhortation to do penance in that way.

With this will and intention, dear Christians, make penances of your daily crosses, and then, as I freely acknowledge once more, you do not need any others. One can easily err through imprudence in inflicting penances on himself; but yours come from the hand of God, and if you receive them as I have said, there is no chance of your making a mistake. Sometimes you will think it hard, nay, even impossible, to bear those trials for a long time; but what better will you be for giving way to impatience and discontent? If you do so, you will have to suffer all the same, and it will be without any advantage for you. Console yourselves with the thought of the joy that is in store for you. When the sick man is in the hands of the doctor, who is burning and cutting him, and giving him bitter medicines, he cries out against the doctor and calls him a cruel murderer; but when he is cured, and his wounds are healed, he kisses with joy the hand, the knife, the iron that inflicted the salutary wound, while the doctor is no longer a murderer, but his dearest friend, to whom, under God, he owes his life. Believe me, my dear brethren, it will be just the same with you, with regard to the penances that you inflict on yourselves of your own accord, or bear with resignation when they come from the hand of God. Like the sick man under the knife, you will sometimes cry out, and complain of them as cruel; but wait till your cure is accomplished, and you will bless God for having sent them for the good of your souls. You will thank the preachers and confessors

who have advised you to mortify yourselves. Happy eyes, you will say, that have often wept with grief, or have voluntarily overcome yourselves; now you will see the most beautiful of all beings, the sight of whom fills the angels and saints in heaven with happiness! Happy hands, that have labored hard for daily bread; you will now wave the palm-branch of victory! Happy limbs, that have suffered pain and torture in sickness and infirmity; you are now about to enjoy eternal rest with God in heaven! Comforted with this hope, my dear brethren, let us all resolve to bring forth fruits worthy of penance. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the second Sunday of Lent.

Text.

Audientes discipuli ceciderunt in faciem suam, et timuerunt valde.—Matt. xvii. 6.

"The disciples, hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid."

Introduction.

What had the disciples heard on the mountain to make them so much afraid? A voice that came from the clouds, saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him," and follow Him as your Master. But why should that make them afraid? Had they not rather reason to rejoice that their Master's glory was thus confirmed from heaven, and that He was declared to be the Son of God? Yet, when the disciples heard those words, they fell on their faces with fear. With reason does the Psalmist say of us mortals: "There have they trembled for fear, where there was no fear."[1] When I was speaking in my last sermon, my dear brethren, of the necessity every Christian is under of doing penance, especially when he has sinned, no doubt many who were listening to me were filled with fear of having some terrible austerities proposed to them. But I say to them, in the words of Christ to His disciples: "Fear not;" it is not so bad as you think. It is not so difficult to do penance, as we might imagine at first, as I shall show in this instruction.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

[1] Illic trepidaverunt timore, ubi non erat timor.—Ps. xiii. 5.

THIRTY-SEVENTH SERMON.

ON THE PENITENTIAL WORKS OF THE INNOCENT AND THE JUST.

Subject.

Even the innocent and the just must do penance, because they may sin at some future time.—*Preached on the fourth Sunday of Advent.*

Text.

Venit in omnem regionem Jordanis prædicans baptismum pœnitentiæ in remissionem peccatorum.—Luke iii. 3.

"And he came into all the country about the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins."

Introduction.

As a penitent, although innocent and never stained with sin, according to the testimony of the Eternal Truth, the great St. John, than whom there never was greater born of woman, goes about publicly preaching the baptism of penance. What kind of a baptism? What kind of a penance? Not the holy sacrament of baptism, that now cleanses our souls from original sin; nor the sacrament of penance, in which, after having confessed our sins with true sorrow, we are absolved from them; for both these sacraments were afterwards instituted by Christ. What was the penance, then? St. John himself explains it when he says to those who came to him to be baptized, as we read in the third chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke; "Ye offspring of vipers, who hath showed you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of penance."[1] In these words, according to the explanation of St. Augustine, he alluded to the sorrow they should have for sin, as well as to the penitential works they should voluntarily undertake in order to satisfy the divine justice. This penance, my dear brethren, I have already treated of, and have shown that every one who has been a sinner ought to make some atonement of the kind to God. But suppose, now, that one has paid to the last farthing the debt incurred by sin, or that one has never sinned; even in that case, I say,

[1] Genimina viperarum, quis ostendit vobis fugere a ventura ira? Facite ergo fructus dignos pœnitentiæ.—Luke iii. 7, 8.

Plan of Discourse.

Such a one must nevertheless do penance. Why? Because he may sin in future. And this is the whole subject of this sermon, which concerns all without exception.

I begin it, trusting in the help of the Holy Ghost, through the intercession of Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

The servant who has once injured his master will be treated with more severity in future, lest he do it again.

A servant has done something grievously displeasing to his master; for instance, he has been detected stealing things out of the house; or, else, he has gone about incautiously with a candle, and set fire to the house; but, fortunately, with the help of the neighbors, the fire has been extinguished, and the servant, by forfeiting a part of his salary, has made good the loss occasioned by his carelessness. Is the master satisfied now? Not by any means. It is now that he really begins to be angry with his servant, and to reprove him sharply. But the latter has repented of his fault, and made reparation for it? True; still, he has done the mischief once, and may do it again; so that, to prevent a recurrence of it, he must be sharply reproved, that he may become more careful. In any case, so much confidence is not reposed in him as formerly, and his master looks after him more strictly, thinking that he may serve him the same trick again, if he is not closely watched.

A good horse is occasionally spurred, that he may keep up his pace.

A horse may be going at a good pace and according to the wish of his rider, still, the latter now and then lets him feel the bit and the spur. Why? What fault has the poor animal committed? He is going all right. No matter; he must feel that his rider is watchful, so that he may continue holding on the same pace, and not give way to laziness, or fatigue, or make a spring off the road, or stumble and fall, and throw his rider out of the saddle.

These similes signify two classes of just souls.

There are two classes of men, my dear brethren, who are in the friendship, grace, and favor of God. The first consists of those who have sinned grievously, but have done penance, and have become reconciled to God; and they constitute the greater number of the just. For how many grown-up people are there who can dare to use the words that the innocent Job says of himself: "My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake; for my heart doth not reprehend me in all my life."[1] Who is there who can say, with truth, that his conscience does not reproach him with any sin? Alas, must not the most of us

[1] Justificationem meam, quam cœpi tenere, non deseram: neque enim reprehendit me cor meum in omni vita mea?—Job xxvii. 6.

humbly acknowledge, with the penitent David, "To Thee only," O Lord, "have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee."[1] The other class, and it is not at all a numerous one, consists of those who have still preserved their baptismal innocence, and have never offended God, at least mortally and deliberately. O happy souls! If envy could find place in heaven, how many of the greatest saints, whose feasts the Catholic Church celebrates every year, would envy you your great happiness!

He who has sinned mortally is like the servant.

Those who belong to the first class are like the servant who has robbed his master, or whose carelessness has caused the latter to suffer loss. Consider, O you Christians, who have sinned mortally, how unfaithful you have been to your Lord and your God, when you deliberately robbed Him of His glory by contemning His commandments! Consider what a dangerous conflagration the careless servant, that is, the flesh with its senses and members, has caused; a conflagration that has destroyed all the merits of the soul, and exposed it to the eternal flames of hell. Now you are saved from the danger. By true sorrow and contrition, by the tears of repentance you have shed, you have completely extinguished that fire, that would otherwise have burned forever. I will suppose, moreover, that you have made good all the damage you caused by theft or carelessness, and that you have completely wiped away all the punishment due to your sins, by the perfection of your sorrow, or by works of satisfaction, so that you owe nothing more to the divine justice. I congratulate you with all my heart, if that is the case.

Therefore, even after his conversion, he must be dealt with very strictly, to prevent him from sinning again.

But is that a reason for your giving yourself no further trouble about the matter? How about the master of the house, I mean the soul, who has had such great difficulty in extinguishing the fire, and who has had to heave so many penitent sighs before being fully reconciled to God? How about the insolent servants, who by their wantonness and carelessness have injured their master, and caused that dangerous fire? Must they now be allowed to go unpunished and to do as they please, seeking only their own comfort and convenience? Must the soul look on at them without giving way to a just indignation, without keeping a watchful eye on their actions, and without putting them under any restraint? Oh, you may believe me that there is reason enough for fearing that they will again attempt to do the mischief they have done already; their recklessness has not altogether left them, nor are their evil inclinations completely

[1] Tibi soli peccavi, et malum coram te feci.—Ps. l. 6.

subdued. The unclean spirit, as we read in the Gospel of St. Luke, is indeed banished, and the house is cleansed; but he will not leave it at that: "I will return into my house whence I came out;"[1] I will bring still more wicked companions with me, and will attack that man, who has escaped from my slavery, with more violent temptations, and then "the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."[2] This is the time, my dear brethren, for the strong man armed to keep his court, as we read in the same Gospel; that is, the soul must have all the less confidence in the flesh and its senses, it must be all the more watchful over them, and burden them with all the more severe penances, so as to keep them constantly in check, and not allow them to injure the soul by renewed unfaithfulness and again to kindle in it a hellish fire.

He who is still innocent is like the willing horse.

Those who are still innocent are like the good horse; they have kept up their pace, and, as David says, they have run on in the way of God's commandments without delay, and they have never strayed from that way. I congratulate them still more heartily than the others (ah, would that I could reckon myself among their number!). But, alas, for the weakness and instability of man, how many there are who have begun well on the right way, and have abandoned it in the end most disgracefully! David made an excellent beginning, so that he was a man after God's own heart; but how he ran away afterwards, when he allowed too much liberty to his eyes, which he should have always kept in check. He became a murderer and an adulterer. Solomon, his son, also made a good beginning; he had received a good soul from the Lord, as he himself says: "I was a witty child, and had received a good soul. And whereas I was more good, I came to a body undefiled."[3] But how dissolute and wanton he became afterwards, when he gave way to his carnal desires, which he should have restrained. So far did he stray from the right path, that he adored gods of stone, to please his concubines, and offered incense to them. Saul, who preceded these two, also began very well. "Saul, a choice and goodly man," such is the testimony the Holy Scripture gives of him, "and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he."[4] And yet, how obstinate and rebellious he became,

[1] Revertar in domum meam, unde exivi.—Luke xi. 24.

[2] Et fiunt novissima hominis illius pejora prioribus.—Ibid. 26.

[3] Puer autem eram ingeniosus, et sortitus sum animam bonam. Et cum essem magis bonus, veni ad corpus incoinquinatum.—Wisd. viii. 19, 20.

[4] Saul electus et bonus, et non erat vir de filiis Israel melior illo.—I. Kings ix. 2.

because he did not restrain his evil inclinations. He was rejected by God on account of disobedience, and killed himself in despair. Reason enough, therefore, have we to take to heart the warning of St. Paul: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall."[1]

In a word, no matter how innocent we are, we are still capable of committing sin; we bear about with us a body inclined to sin like all other men, so that we must be always on the watch, if we wish to keep on the right road. Although the horse has been good hitherto, he must be made to feel the bit and the spur frequently, so as to prevent him from lagging or stumbling. Even the most innocent bodies are in need of works of penance and mortification, to prevent them from forgetting that their master keeps a watchful eye on them, lest, by unrestrained indulgence in all lawful pleasures, they rebel against authority. But you say, it is not right to beat and punish one who has done no wrong. It would be cruelty to treat an innocent person with severity. Cruelty, indeed! It would seem cruel, but would in reality be the greatest kindness. Our God is not cruel or unjust, but is infinitely good and merciful; and yet He allowed the devil to torment most cruelly the innocent Job; He is a God who always means well to his children, and yet He visits even the holiest of them in this life with various trials and crosses. But these latter know well His paternal goodness, and therefore they meekly kiss the rod, and say, with holy Job: "Blessed be the name of the Lord;" He knows best what is good for us, and if He does not send us those trials to atone for past sins, His intention, then, is to save us from future sins.

So that he must be made to feel the spur now and then, to keep him innocent.

And this is the reason that should impel even the most innocent, as well as those who have sinned grievously, to mortify themselves frequently; the former, that they may not begin to sin; the latter, that they may not relapse into it. For as the Council of Trent says, there is nothing that can better preserve one free from sin than voluntary penances and mortifications. "There is no doubt," such are the words of the Council, "that these atoning pains withdraw one from sin, as with bit and bridle, and render penitents more cautious and vigilant."[2] According to the old saying, even an ass will not stumble twice over the same stone; and so, too, with us, there is nothing we are

All this is done by works of penance; for they deter from sin.

[1] Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat.—I. Cor. x. 12.

[2] Procul dubio magnopere a peccato revocant, et quasi fræno quodam cœrcent hæ satisfactoriæ pœnæ, cautioresque et vigilantiores in futurum pœnitentes efficiunt.—Trid. sess. 14.

so apt to remember as what has caused us pain, so that, if we acknowledge our obligation of punishing ourselves for our sins, and chastise ourselves by works of penance for the sins we commit, the danger of a relapse will certainly be considerably lessened for us. The remembrance of the pain we have suffered, and for which our fastidious nature has only dislike and disgust, will deter us from doing what is followed by such sharp retribution. And this is the opinion of the Angelic Doctor, St. Thomas: "Man does not easily fall back into those sins which have caused him to suffer."[1]

Shown by similes, with regard to him who has sinned.

The criminal who has been branded and publicly scourged, although he has escaped with his life, will not readily return to the town in which that punishment has been inflicted on him. A child, while playing in the street, falls down and dirties its clothes; it runs home, crying, and its mother cleans it. And is that all she does? Then you will see how quickly the spoiled child will go back to the same place, and fall into the mud again. A cleaning alone will not make much impression on it. But when the mother takes the rod in her hand, and punishes the child, the lesson is not so easily forgotten; it will avoid that place in future, as the place which has caused it to get a beating. "If," says St. Augustine, "one could so quickly recover after sin, that the sacramental absolution would suffice to restore the health of the soul completely, then he would make a pastime of sinning unto death."[2] And this explains why people so often relapse into sin after confession. They declare their sins in confession, and say a few rosaries or *Pater Nosters* for their penance, and think they have done enough to atone for everything. But how can that alone deter them from vice, and make them more careful in future? Why, asks St. Augustine, does God require, in addition to the sacramental absolution and forgiveness of sin, that the penitent should also satisfy for his sins? "Because," he answers, "man must be compelled to suffer, even after his sins have been forgiven, although his sins are the primary cause of his suffering; satisfaction is required for sin, after its guilt has been remitted, lest we should think little of sin if punishment were to cease as soon as its guilt is taken away."[3] Thus

[1] Non facile homo ad peccata redit ex quibus pœnam expertus est.—St. Thom., in Sap. plem. q. 15, a. 1.

[2] Si cito rediret homo ad pristinam valetudinem, ludus illi esset peccando cadere in mortem.

[3] Cogitur homo tolerare etiam remissis peccatis, quamvis, ut in eam veniat miseriam, primum fuerit causa peccatum; productior est enim pœna, quam culpa; ne parva putaretur culpa, si cum illa finiretur et pœna.—S. Aug., Tr. 124.

the penitent is deterred from relapsing into sin. Now, to say a rosary or two, or to fast now and then in the evening (I am speaking of what are now considered great penances), to give a few shillings to the poor, is it possible for penances of the kind to deter from sin and to keep a check on the unbridled passions of one who is by nature inclined to evil? Certainly not; it would be ridiculous to imagine it; the body must be made to feel something, if it is to be frightened from falling into sin.

And to him who is innocent.

With regard to the penances that the innocent must inflict on themselves, they may argue in the following manner: If I have to chastise my body, and to keep its senses under restraint, so as to prevent myself from falling into sin, what would I have to suffer if I were actually guilty of offending God grievously? Therefore I must be careful now of never consenting to mortal sin. Moreover, when they have learned to exercise such restraint over their senses, as to deny themselves even lawful pleasures, or to bear for the love of God what they could avoid without sin, they will certainly be far more ready to abhor pleasures that cannot be indulged in without committing grievous sin, and to bear willingly even bitter trials that they could not avoid without offending God, so that voluntary penances are of great use in deterring from sin both classes of men.

The innocent man has evil inclinations; while the sinner is still more inclined to his former vices.

Besides, no matter how innocent or pious one may be, he has inherited from our first parents evil inclinations and desires, which never wholly die out in him. No matter how sincerely one repents of his sins, and how thoroughly he has atoned for them, the evil habits and relics of sin still remain to entice him, like a second nature, to commit the same sins, and it requires a long time to eradicate these. The wise Ecclesiasticus, speaking of a child who is not kept under due restraint, says: "His father is dead, and he is as if he were not dead: for he hath left one behind him that is like himself."[1] You may cut a shrub down to the ground, but if you do not pull up the roots it will grow again. The sick man is cured of his fever, and he is glad of it; but is his former strength completely restored? Not by any means; he must be satisfied to feel very weak for a long time still, and to remain in a warm room until he is strong enough to go out into the open air. Besides, there are many kinds of food that he has a good appetite for, but that he dare not touch yet; and if he is guilty of the least excess in eating or

[1] Mortuus est pater ejus, et quasi non est mortuus: similem enim reliquit sibi post se.—Ecclus. xxx. 4.

drinking, he will bring on a relapse, and will place himself in a much worse condition than he was in before. Penitent Christian, you have been truly sorry for your sins and have duly confessed them; the good God has forgiven you and admitted you to His grace and friendship; I will even imagine that all the punishment due to your sins has also been remitted. Rejoice, then, with all your heart, and thank God; "the father is dead;" the cause and origin of your guilt and punishment are taken away; but be not, therefore, too confident; "he is as if he were not dead;" he still lives on in his children, which he has left you in the shape of evil desires and inclinations. The tree which has borne such bad fruits has been cut down; but its roots are still in the ground, and it can easily begin to grow again. Your mortal illness has been healed by the Blood of Christ, which has been poured over you in the sacrament of penance; but the strength of the soul is not by any means fully restored yet; the inordinate desire of the former forbidden pleasures is not yet fully extinguished, and may easily bring on a relapse.

As the penitent David well knew.

Hear king David, crying out to God after his sin was repented and pardoned: "Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."[1] But why, O great king, asks St. John Chrysostom, do you wish to be cleansed more and more from your sins? "What more do you desire?"[2] God has already assured you, by the Prophet Nathan, that He has taken away your sin and erased it from His great account-book; why, then, do you desire to be cleansed more and more? Ah, answers St. Chrysostom, in the person of David, "I seek my former beauty,"[3] that which my soul had before I sinned. It is true, O God, and I thank Thee for it, that Thou hast healed the mortal wound from which I was suffering; but an ugly scar still remains, which I wish to have removed. I still feel the force of old habit and evil inclination; the relics of my former sins still inflame my desires, and try to drag me, as if by violence, into forbidden pleasures; therefore "wash me yet more from my iniquity."

Penitential works are a powerful means of restraining both.

Now, my dear brethren, how are these evil effects of sin to be destroyed? By often renewing our sorrow and contrition? By gaining the indulgences granted by the Church? By constant and earnest prayer, and the practice of good works? Yes, these are all very powerful means of obtaining remission of the punishment still due to sin, and of increasing our merit and glory in

[1] Amplius lava me ab iniquitate mea, et a peccato meo munda me.—Ps. l. 4.
[2] Quid amplius quæris?
[3] Pristinum decorem quæro.

heaven; but they are not able to destroy at once the relics of sin and the evil habit of cursing, slandering, intemperance, unchaste looks, and impure passion. These things require another remedy, which must be able to tame the wantonness of the flesh, and by a judicious severity to bring it to a healthy condition. The old, bad habit must be opposed by a new and contrary one, and the best and surest way of doing this is to practise mortification and penance, as we again learn from the Council of Trent: "Mortification heals the relics of sin, and the vicious habits which have been acquired by living in sin, and takes them away by acts of the contrary virtues."[1] Thus immortification of the eyes is amended by checking their curiosity and not allowing them to look at agreeable objects, although they may not be unlawful; pride is corrected by voluntary humiliations; gluttony and drunkenness, by fasting and abstinence; slander, backbiting, and detraction, cursing and swearing, by the rather difficult remedy of silence; while the wantonness of the flesh is chastised by the use of different instruments of penance and by bearing patiently the trials sent by God. "Every valley shall be filled," cried out St. John the Baptist, when he was publicly exhorting the people to do penance; "and every mountain and hill shall be brought low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways, plain."[2] In these words he describes the wonderful effects of true penance. What appears more difficult than to fill up the deep valleys, to level off lofty mountains, and to make crooked ways straight? And yet that is what is done, in a moral sense, by penance and mortification. "The valleys are filled," that is, the soul, that has been robbed by sin of its merits and virtues, and is, as it were, completely emptied, becomes filled up again by penance. "Every mountain and hill shall be brought low;" that is, the pride which dared to lift itself up against the almighty God shall be humbled by penance. "The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways plain;" that is, inordinate desires and inclinations will be tamed by mortification and self-denial, and the bad habits that have been contracted will be abandoned, in order to live according to the law and teaching of Jesus Christ.

They also cut off the

Besides, we know by experience that he who wishes to avoid sin must keep away from all company and occasions that might

[1] Medentur peccatorum reliquiis, et vitiosos habitus, male vivendo comparatos, contrariis virtutum actionibus tollunt.

[2] Omnis vallis implebitur, et omnis mons et collis humiliabitur; et erunt prava in directa, et aspera in vias planas.—Luke iii. 5.

occasion of sin.

lead him into it, and, as I have shown in a former sermon, it is forbidden under pain of grievous sin to go voluntarily into the danger of offending God mortally, while of other occasions the Holy Ghost says, "He that loveth danger shall perish in it."[1] Now, it is the wanton flesh and its outward senses that bring us into the dangerous occasions, when we allow ourselves unrestrained liberty in seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and speaking, while mortification and self-denial cut off the occasion at once. In a word, a man cannot lead a luxurious, comfortable life, seeking always for creature comforts, without falling into sin very soon. The proof of this we shall see on another occasion.

And move God to bestow powerful graces against sin.

Finally, there is nothing so likely to move the already most generous God to bestow His graces liberally on man, and to provide him with special helps to keep him from further sin, than to see him humbling and chastising himself, and keeping a strict watch on himself, with a full knowledge of his own frailty, so that he practises self-denial to such an extent as to refrain from even lawful enjoyments, in order to chastise his flesh and to avoid offending God. Thus man, by being severe to himself, vies, as it were, with God, and compels Him to be more merciful and more generous. Such is the beautiful idea of Tertullian, who says: "worn out by fasting, we assail heaven by envy,"[2] and compel God to show us His favor and mercy.

Therefore even the most innocent have reason to do penance.

Now I know, my dear brethren, the reason of a fact that has always appeared strange to me, namely, why even the most innocent and holy souls chastised their bodies so unmercifully. What sin had holy Job committed, who was so perfect that he was praised by God Himself, and whose conscience never reproached him with a single sin in his whole life? And yet he bore with the most astounding patience the trials that God allowed him to be afflicted with, and, moreover, he says with the deepest humility: "I reprehend myself, and do penance in dust and ashes."[3] What fault did St. John the Baptist commit, who was sanctified in his mother's womb, and who never, during his whole life, offended God by the least venial sin? Truly, he had nothing to atone for. What, then, was the meaning of the rough camel's-hair garment he wore, and of the fast he observed so strictly, that Christ said of him: "John came, neither eating

[1] Qui amat periculum, in illo peribit.—Ecclus. iii. 27.
[2] Jejuniis aridi, invidia cœlum tundimus.
[3] Ipse me reprehendo, et ago pœnitentiam in favilla et cinere.—Job xlii. 6.

nor drinking?"[1] "You are surprised," says St. Bernard, "at the extraordinary austerities of such a holy and innocent man; but," he continues, "I know what he meant. Although he had never sinned, and, therefore, was not bound to any satisfaction, yet he was well aware that, as a human being, he had still his liberty, and was capable of sin; if he had no sins to atone for, he had them at least to guard against." It is well, O great Saint, that you added those words to your explanation; for, otherwise, I might have said to you, wonder at yourself, O Bernard, for what crime had you committed, that you used to scourge yourself so severely, and observe most rigorous fasts, although at the time you were weak in body, so that you looked more like a walking skeleton than a living man? What crime had the holy youth Aloysius committed, who preserved his baptismal innocence undefiled till his death; nay, who, according to the testimony of Cardinal Bellarmine, was so confirmed in grace, that he could hardly find matter enough for the sacrament of penance in his whole life; who, while he was still in the world, and in royal palaces, used to sleep on hard boards, measure out his chief meal by the ounce, and chastise his body even to blood? What sin had Edmund committed, who, when he was still a little child, used to receive from his mother, when she was dressing him, a hair-girdle, or some other instrument of penance, with an earnest exhortation to use it diligently? (Christian parents, how do you bring up your children? See how this mother trained her dear child from his tenderest years; how do you act towards your children? Oh, the poor things are still young; let them enjoy themselves now! Yes, so you say, and you know therefore what you have to expect!) And those empresses and princesses, whose holy lives are world-famed, what had they done to render it necessary for them to practise such severe penances? Amongst them was Eleonora Theresa, the wife of the great emperor Leopold I., who is well deserving of special mention, for she used to go on pilgrimages with the soles cut off her shoes, or with pebbles and peas in them, while proofs of the severe disciplines she used to inflict on herself were found in the cloths with which she wiped up the blood off the floor of her room, and which were discovered after her death. Ah, innocent souls, I ask again, why such severity towards yourselves? What fault had those bodies committed, that were always obedient to reason, and subject to the divine law? Why must that

[1] Venit Johannes, neque manducans neque bibens.—Matt. xi. 18.

flesh be tortured and chastised, which never indulged in unlawful pleasures? And they would answer me, in the words that St. Bernard used when speaking of St. John the Baptist, although we had not sinned, yet we were but mortal, and were capable of sinning, so that we had to keep our bodies in check, in order to preserve our innocence.

St. Paul especially is an example to sinners in this respect.

"I chastise my body," says St. Paul, "and bring it into subjection."[1] He does not say, I chastised my body in the beginning of my conversion, or for some years after, in order to atone for my sins; but, I chastise and scourge it now, that I have the care of so many churches; now, that I have to go about everywhere preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ; now, that I am driven from one town to another; now, that I have to suffer countless persecutions and dangers by land and sea, amidst toil and labor, praying and watching, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, poverty and misery; in all those trials "I chastise my body . . . I so fight, not as one beating the air,"[2] but I make my body feel the weight of the penances I inflict on it. And why, O great Saint? "Lest, perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away;"[3] lest, after having shown others the way to heaven by my doctrine, I myself should wander away from it, and be lost forever. But, great Apostle, how could you be afraid of that? Your own conscience bore testimony to you that, as you say yourself, you were a child of God and a co-heir of Christ? Why should you dread eternal damnation, after your repeated protestations that "neither death, nor life . . . nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God?"[4] How is it that, in spite of all you did for the glory of God and the good of souls, you were afraid of losing your soul, unless you chastised your body?

Conclusion and resolution to chastise our bodies after the example of those saints.

Alas, how will it then be with me and others? With me, who am so careful in looking after my comfort; who cannot endure the least bodily inconvenience, unless for the sake of worldly vanity; nay, who pamper my body so that it becomes for myself as well as for others an occasion of sin? How shall it be with me, who am so ready with all kinds of empty pretexts and excuses, in order to obtain permission to gratify my sensual-

[1] Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutem redigo.—I. Cor. ix. 27.
[2] Sic pugno, non quasi aerem verberans.—Ibid. 26.
[3] Ne forte, cum aliis prædicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.—Ibid. 27.
[4] Neque mors, neque vita . . . neque instantia, neque futura . . . neque creatura alia poterit nos separare a charitate Dei.—Rom. viii. 38, 39.

ity by eating meat during the Lent; who cannot bear any trouble, and act in those trials that I must bear in any case as if I had the torments of hell to suffer? Alas, what will become of me? Now I see how it is that I have so often fallen into sin, in spite of the good resolutions I made in confession. I was unwilling to use violence against myself, and I indulged my body and its outward senses too freely, so that they became too strong for me. But I shall manage better in future. I will keep a more watchful eye on those careless servants; I will make that stubborn horse feel the bit and the spur, so that I may be armed against temptations, keep my soul free from sin, and be surer of gaining the endless joys of heaven. Amen.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the third Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Cum fortis armatus custodit atrium suum, in pace sunt ea quæ possidet.—Luke xi. 21.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his court, those things are in peace which he possesseth."

Introduction.

He who does not wish to be robbed must keep his house well locked up during the night; and therefore there are bars and bolts on doors and windows, as well as vigilant watch dogs to keep guard. He who intends to keep a city or fortress safe from the attacks of the enemy must see that it has a sufficient number of soldiers, and that it is provided with all the munitions of war. Christ Himself, my dear brethren, explains this simile in to-day's Gospel, when He speaks of the man out of whose heart the unclean spirit is driven by penance; and who is hereby warned that he must be well armed and carefully guard his house, so as not to allow the evil spirit to enter again, and make the last state of it worse than the first. Hitherto we have treated of the penance that must be done by those who have sinned grievously, in order to satisfy the divine justice for their sins. But now suppose that all, etc.—*Continues as above.*

THIRTY-EIGHTH SERMON.

ON THE REASONABLENESS OF WORKS OF PENANCE FOR US WHO ADORE A SUFFERING AND MORTIFIED GOD.

Subject.

We live under a suffering and mortified God; therefore we must imitate Him in suffering and mortification.—*Preached on the Sunday in the Octave of the Nativity of Our Lord.*

Text.

Positus est hic in ruinam et in resurrectionem multorum in Israel, et in signum cui contradicetur.—Luke ii. 34.

"This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted."

Introduction.

Hardly is the Saviour of the world born, when the contradictions and sufferings that were in store for Him were spoken of: "He is set for a sign which shall be contradicted." Already, too, do they speak of the sword which was to pierce the virginal heart of Mary at the sight of the terrible scourging, the disgraceful crowning with thorns, the painful crucifixion and death of her beloved Son: "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." Even then, my dear brethren, the future torments that awaited the Son of God were prophesied; but He did not wait for them, for His first entrance into the world was the beginning of His sufferings, and from then until the moment of His death He bore His cross without ceasing, as the history of His life shows. Such was the life of penance and mortification led by Him who did not and could not commit the smallest sin. O Christians, what must we, who, generally speaking, treat our flesh so delicately, think of this? We, who must acknowledge that we have often grievously sinned, and thereby deserved the torments of hell; and who on account of our weakness are still capable of committing sin any day or any hour? have we not reason to fear, that, if we cease doing penance, we shall be amongst the number of those unhappy ones of whom the text says, "this Child is set for the fall of many," for the eternal ruin of those who either do not believe in Him, or do not endeavor to imitate His life? Therefore, if we have not yet heard enough to induce us to lead

penitential lives, I will give you one more incentive to-day, and I say,

Plan of Discourse.

We live under a suffering and mortified God; therefore we must imitate Him in suffering and mortification. This conclusion follows of necessity from the premises, and is the whole subject of this sermon. Therefore in future we shall all be willing to suffer and do penance.

That we may all make this resolution, give us Thy grace, O suffering and mortified Saviour! We ask it of Thee through the intercession of Thy sorrowful Mother Mary and of the holy guardian angels.

The members of the body must be proportioned to the head; otherwise deformity is the result.

When the members of the body are not proportioned to the head, the result is ugliness and deformity. A large head on a small body with short legs make a hideous dwarf, while a small head on a huge, fat body is ridiculous. A body clothed with costly garments, adorned with gold and silver, while the head is unkempt and dirty, with dishevelled locks, would seem a very bug-bear to frighten children with; for ragged clothes would suit such a body far better, as it would then be better in harmony with the head.

As men we are members of Jesus Christ, who is our Head.

What are we mortals on this earth, my dear brethren? We are members one of another,"[1] says St. Paul; we constitute the moral body of the Catholic Church under one head. What Head is that? "Know you not," asks St. Paul again, "that your bodies are the members of Christ?"[2] "We may in all things grow up in Him, who is the head, even Christ."[3] But of what kind is this Head? Consider it well, and see, then, how we must be, if, as members, we are to be proportioned to such a Head. If it were a Head crowned with roses, then, indeed, would it be fitting for the members of its body to be clothed in soft garments.

But He embraced a life of penance and mortification.

But just give a short glance at the whole life of Jesus Christ Our Saviour, from His birth to His last moment on the cross, and you will find nothing but self-denial, mortification, suffering, crosses, and trials, which He took on Himself voluntarily for us and for our sins. His first appearance in the world is marked by suffering, for He was born in a miserable stable, and was laid

[1] Sumus invicem membra.—Eph. iv. 25.
[2] Nescitis quoniam corpora vestra membra sunt Christi?—I. Cor. vi. 15.
[3] Crescamus in illo per omnia, qui est caput, Christus.—Eph. iv. 15.

in a manger instead of a bed; He suffered in His circumcision, when, as a little Child only a week old, He shed His blood; He suffered in the flight into Egypt, in which, in addition to the discomforts He had to endure, He was persecuted by His own creatures; He suffered during the thirty years of His hidden life in the poor little cottage of Nazareth, unknown to the world, and giving up His own will in order to live in obedience, and to earn His bread by the sweat of His brow, as a poor carpenter's apprentice; He suffered during the last three years of His life, when, after a fast of forty days and nights, He went from one town to the other, in heat and cold, in rain and wind, and on foot. Many a night He spent in watching, as the Gospel says of Him: "He passed the whole night in the prayer of God."[1] Many a time He slept on the bare ground; many a time, wearied with His journeys, He sat down on a hard stone to rest Himself; while He often begged from others food and drink when He was hungry and thirsty, sought hospitality at the hands of strangers, and even asked them for a drink of water.

Especially at the end of it.

He suffered in the last days of His bitter passion. Oh! what need is there to remind you of that? He was truly "a man of sorrows,"[2] as Isaias describes the future Messias. What more eloquent proof could we have of that, than the ropes that bound Him as a malefactor; the blows with which He was driven along; the buffets that disfigured His adorable face; the sharp thorns that pierced His sacred head even to the brain; the whips and scourges that tore His whole body; the nails that pierced His hands and feet; the shameful gibbet on which He hung for three hours in His death-agony? There was not a member of His body that had not its own most piercing pain to endure; not one of His exterior senses that was not tortured in the most excruciating manner; His eyes were swollen and bloodshot; His ears were afflicted by the horrible blasphemies and curses that were uttered around Him; His taste was tortured by the gall and vinegar that were given Him to drink, while the sense of feeling was afflicted most grievously in every part of His sacred body. There was none of all the conditions that are required of us for true penance that He did not fulfil, as if He were a penitent sinner. What a bitter examination of conscience He made in the Garden of Gethsemani, when He saw passing before His mind all the past, present, and future sins of

[1] Erat pernoctans in oratione Dei.—Luke vi. 12.
[2] Virum dolorum.—Is. liii. 3.

the whole world? What a perfect contrition He had for those sins, when He was sorrowful even to death, and the bloody sweat ran down from Him in drops on the ground? What a humble confession He made, when, laden with the huge burden of our iniquities, He stood before His judge, like a convicted criminal, to hear the sentence that condemned Him to the cross? What severe penance and satisfaction He offered for those sins, when He suffered the atrocious tortures of His shameful death? And all this He endured, although He was perfectly innocent, partly in order to show us how to do penance for our sins, to confess them, and to satisfy for them; and partly in order to show us the right road to heaven, which can be gained only by the violent.

So that an unmortified Christian is a deformed member.

From this, my dear brethren, you can make your own conclusion, as to what kind of members suit a Head like that. What a startling contrast there is, what a hideous deformity, when you compare a voluptuous Christian, who can neither bear temporal trials with patience, nor mortify or overcome himself, with Our Saviour and His life? For you see the Head crowned with sharp thorns, while the feet are resting on a cushion of roses; the Head emaciated with hunger and thirst, and the body sleek and well-conditioned; the Head deformed and swollen with blows, and the body clothed in costly array; Christ in poverty and extreme want, and the Christian in abundance, without denying himself anything; Christ in labor and trials, and the sweat of His brow, while the Christian lives in comfort and affluence; Christ having nothing better than gall and vinegar to quench His thirst, while the Christian always seeks the costliest viands; Christ on the hard wood of the cross, and the Christian in a soft down bed; Christ on the cross, in suffering, and the Christian in delights without the cross; innocence doing penance, and a sinful mortal indulging his sensuality; the life of Christ a continual mortification and cross, the life of the Christian an uninterrupted round of pleasure and enjoyment. Could a greater contrast be found? How can an unmortified man dare to take the crucifix in his hand? How can he look on it without blushing? For even the dumb figure reproves him. Yes, it says to him, you are, indeed, a fine Christian! I, your God, am hanging here on the cross, and you are bent on enjoying yourself. I am doing penance for your sins, and you think it is enough for you merely to declare them in confession, and that you need not take any further trouble about them. I must suffer, and thereby enter into My glory; while you imagine you can walk comfort-

ably into heaven, at your ease. What a shameful, intolerable reproof that is to deserve!

Therefore even the most innocent must do penance, in order to resemble Christ.

But Christians, if we had never sinned in our whole lives, so that we do not deserve the least punishment, and if it were impossible for us to sin in future, so that we are not under the necessity of restraining our senses; nay, if the choice were given us to gain heaven by living in constant pleasure, or by suffering many crosses and trials; if we have any sense of decency left, we should choose the latter, rather than the former, when we consider how the God whom we adore suffered and was crucified for us.

Shown by an example from profane history.

When Hannibal, the great Carthaginian hero, was advancing on Rome with a large army, which he was trying to lead over high mountains, with great trouble, danger, and loss of life, some of his soldiers began to murmur and complain. Seeing this, he mounted a high rock and called out to them, in a loud voice, where is your courage gone all of a sudden? Consider the importance of the expedition in which we are engaged. We are going to conquer Rome, the proud mistress of the world. Remember the rich booty that awaits us, and do not forget that, if the fatigues of the march are great, the joy of victory will be all the greater on that account. Finally, recollect that you are not going before Hannibal, but following him."[1] I go before you to show you the way; I am the first to climb the rugged mountains. This short exhortation encouraged the soldiers to follow him boldly.

By another from sacred history.

A similar instance is narrated on the infallible authority of the Word of God, in the First Book of the Machabees. Simon Machabæus, the Jewish general, was advancing with twenty thousand men to attack the enemy, who were in countless numbers; between the opposing forces there was a running river,[2] and the soldiers hesitated about crossing it. What did Simon do? "He saw that the people were afraid to go over the river, so he went over first."[3] Without saying a word to them, he set spurs to his horse, and crossed the river at once. When the people saw that, their fears vanished. "Then the men, seeing him, passed over after him."[4] A hundred preachers could not have done so much to restore the courage of those people as that

[1] Tandem mementote, Hannibali vos non præire, sed Hannibalem sequi.

[2] Fluvius torrens erat inter medium ipsorum.—I. Mach. xvi. 5.

[3] Vidit populum trepidantem ad transfretandum torrentem, et transfretavit primus.—Ibid. 6.

[4] Et viderunt eum viri, et transierunt post eum.—Ibid.

one example of their general; "the men, seeing him, passed over after him."

And he who does not imitate Christ herein must be ashamed of himself.

If we had been present on the occasion, my dear brethren, and had seen how regiment after regiment followed their leader's example, and crossed the river with their officers, but that a few of the common soldiers were afraid to wet their feet, and remained behind on the bank, would we not have cried out to them, cowards that you are, are your lives more valuable than those of your general and his brave officers? At least, would not such have been our thoughts? Now, what can many think of themselves? I mean those delicate, voluptuous Christians, who tremble at the bare idea of crosses and sufferings, of fasting and disciplines, of self-denial and mortification of the flesh? Christian courage, where art thou fled to? We have enemies to combat, who attack us on all sides without intermission, namely, the cunning demon, the perverse world, and our own corrupt flesh; and if we give way and yield to them we are lost. It is certainly difficult sometimes to combat them; we have to cross a running river; but remember what depends on our fighting them. It is not a city of Rome, but an eternity of heavenly joys that we have to gain by violence. Is not this enough to make us fight with courage? Hear what St. Paul says: "Looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, who, having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame. For think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself, that you be not wearied, fainting in your minds."[1] Jesus Christ, our sovereign Lord and General, and our great God, precedes us, crowned with thorns, bearing the marks of the nails and scourges, and crying out to us, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."[2] If Jesus had lived in a magnificent palace, such as would have been suited to His supereminent dignity; if He had sat down daily at a well furnished table, had reclined in a soft bed of down, and given Himself up to a life of pleasure, but had ordered us to practise all kinds of austerites, to chastise the flesh by penance and mortification, and to exercise constant restraint over the senses, could we have reasonably objected to that? Should we have had

[1] Aspicientes in Auctorem fidei, et consummatorem Jesum, qui proposito sibi gaudio sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta. Recogitate enim eum, qui talem sustinuit a peccatoribus adversum semetipsum contradictionem, ut ne fatigemini animis vestris deficientes.—Heb. xii. 2, 3.

[2] Si quis vult post me venire, abneget semetipsum, et tollat crucem suam quotidie, et sequatur me.—Luke ix. 23.

the slightest cause for complaint? Would that have been too much for one who is born in sin, and who has deserved eternal torments, if thereby he could gain everlasting joys? But as it is, remember that Christ is not following you, but going on before you; He is the first to bear the cross, and His cross is the heaviest of all; He first crossed the river of extreme poverty and humiliation, of self-denial and mortification, and of bitter suffering, and men have seen Him, and see Him still by the light of faith, as a God filled with sorrow and affliction, scourged, crowned with thorns, and pierced with nails.

Especially as He has hitherto had so many followers among people of all classes.

"The men seeing him, passed over after him;" there are many men and women in strict religious orders who see Christ and follow Him, by giving up all they have, to live in voluntary poverty, and who exchange their magnificent houses for a small cell, their costly garments for a coarse habit; who, shut up in the four walls of their convent, deny themselves the pleasures they might have enjoyed, nay, deprive themselves of the little comforts that they could have even in the religious state, while they spend their lives in frequent fasting and vigils, and chastise their bodies with hair-shirts and disciplines; and all that through love of penance. "The men, seeing him, passed over after him;" many innocent children even have seen and imitated Him, as well as many kings and queens, emperors and empresses, princes and princesses, many a weak and delicate woman and tender virgin, who, as we have seen already of some, treated themselves with the greatest severity, so as to resemble more closely their suffering, crucified God. And can there be a Christian so cowardly, so delicate, as not to follow his Lord and God at least at a distance, by voluntarily taking up his cross and mortifying himself? Is there any one so degenerate as to be determined to indulge his body and its outward senses in every comfort and pleasure, without restraint? "For shame," says St. Bernard, "to be a delicate member under a Head crowned with thorns." [1]

Without following Him, there is no hope of heaven.

Hear what the Council of Trent says: "The life of a Christian should be a perpetual penance." [2] It must necessarily be so; there is no other way to heaven than that by which Jesus Christ has gone there before us, and which He has taught us by His example; and therefore there is no other way, but that of self-denial, mortification, and the cross. "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me; [3] such are the

[1] Pudeat sub spinoso capite membrum esse delicatum.

[2] Christiana vita perpetua pœnitentia esse debet.

[3] Qui non accipit crucem suam, et sequitur me, non est me dignus.—Matt. x. 38.

words of Our Lord Himself in the Gospel of St. Matthew. "I am the door. By Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved;"[1] but he who does not enter through Me, cannot have eternal life. "What," asks St. Augustine, "is the meaning of entering by Christ?" And he answers, "it means to imitate the life of Christ,"[2] and to walk on the path which He walked on. But what necessity is there for further proof? It is already a certain fact, an article of faith, that they who wish to belong to the number of the elect must in some degree become conformable to the image of the Son of God, as St. Paul expressly teaches: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that he might be the first-born amongst many brethren.[3] Why does St. Paul say that we must be conformable to the "image" of the Son of God? There is a great difference, my dear brethren, between an artist who looks at a picture in order to copy it, and another man who wishes merely to buy the picture, or simply to admire it. The latter runs his eyes two or three times over it, and admires the skill of the painter; that is a beautiful picture, he says; and he buys it, brings it home, and hangs it on the wall of his room; that is all. The former, on the other hand, whose intention is to copy the picture, looks at it a hundred times on all sides; nor is he satisfied with that; he takes his brush, and every time he makes a stroke with it, he looks at the picture again, so as to be sure of representing accurately every line of it, in order that the copy may not be different from the original. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a picture that we must not merely look at and admire; oh, if that were all that is necessary to get to heaven, all Catholics would be amongst the elect; for there is hardly one who has not an image of the crucifixion in his house, which he looks at now and then; there is hardly one who is not struck with admiration when he reads or hears of the penitent and suffering life led by Our Lord; they all wear Our Saviour's image round their necks, and often kiss it with devotion; but that is not enough. Christ is the original picture that we must copy in our lives and actions, in order to resemble Him. "Look, and make it according to the pattern, that was showed thee on the mount."[4] Cast your eyes on this picture, O man! look at it; but set your

[1] Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur.—John x. 9.

[2] Quid est, intrare per Christum? imitari vias Christi.

[3] Quos præscivit, et prædestinavit conformes fieri imaginis Filii sui, ut sit ipse primogenitus in multis fratribus.—Rom. viii. 29.

[4] Inspice, et fac secundum exemplar, quod tibi in monte monstratum est.—Exod. xxv. 40.

hand to work, too, to imitate the example that was shown you on Calvary.

For Christ is appointed as our Teacher, to show us the way to heaven by His example.

In former times men were sent to unreasoning animals to learn from them: "Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways, and learn wisdom."[1] Although this little creature has neither guide nor teacher, yet she "provideth her meat for herself in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest;"[2] learn, then, from her example how you must labor to gain heaven. "Ask now the beasts and they shall teach thee," says the Prophet Job; "and the birds of the air, and they shall tell thee. Speak to the earth, and it shall answer thee: and the fishes of the sea shall tell."[3] That is, ask the horses and oxen, and they will teach you with what patience the yoke of the Lord must be borne by you; ask the birds of the air, and they, by their flight, will tell you how you must detach your heart from earthly things, and from sensual pleasures and delights, so as to soar up untrammelled towards heaven; ask the earth, and it will instruct you as to how you must bring forth fruits worthy of penance; ask the fishes in the sea, and you may learn from them how to swim in the troubled waters of worldly cares, and yet preserve the life of your soul. Thus, I say, in those days men learned a lesson from unreasoning creatures. But now, since Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come down on earth, we have a far more perfect school in which to study. "Learn of Me," says the most perfect of all teachers;[4] learn how to order your lives; this body, that I have taken for your sakes, is just as tender, weak, and delicate as yours; see how I have dealt with it, and learn from Me to treat yours in the same way, if you wish to have part with Me in My kingdom. "He that taketh not up his cross, and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."[5]

In this they who are in trouble can find consolation.

Poor, suffering Christians, who have to labor hard in order to earn your daily bread, or who are oppressed by sickness, suffering and persecution, what a consolation it is for you, if you are only in the state of grace, to have God as your friend, to be able to bear your daily crosses and trials with patience, and to offer them to Him by a supernatural intention. Rejoice and be glad in the Lord; for what you yourselves should have done volun-

[1] Vade ad formicam, O piger, et considera vias ejus, et disce sapientiam.—Prov. vi. 6.

[2] Parat in æstate cibum sibi, et congregat in messe quod comedat.—Ibid. 8.

[3] Interroga jumenta, et docebunt te, et volatilia cœli, et indicabunt tibi. Loquere terræ, et respondebit tibi; et narrabunt pisces maris.—Job xii. 7, 8.

[4] Discite a me —Matt. xi. 29.

[5] Qui non accipit crucem suam, et sequitur me, non est me dignus.—Ibid. x. 38.

tarily otherwise, He now does for you; that is, He imprints daily on your soul the beautiful image of His crucified Son, and makes up for the penances that you should otherwise have inflicted on yourselves. If you sometimes find your trials hard to bear, so that weak nature cries out against them, take the crucifix in your hands, and say to yourselves: see, there is my God hanging on the shameful cross, and suffering here even unto death. He, who was innocence itself, crossed the river of tribulation first, in order to free me from eternal death; why should I not, then, be willing to suffer with Him? I, who by my sins have deserved to suffer a thousand times more? I, who cannot gain heaven in any other way, why should I not bear patiently for a short time the light cross that is laid on my shoulders? For by doing so I shall become like to the image of the Son of God, and shall receive the surest pledge of being amongst the chosen children of God.

Ah, you say, that would be all very well, if I could only bear my cross as I should! But as it is, how can I become like to Jesus Christ by suffering? or how can I merit heaven thereby? I do not suffer of my own free will, nor with patience; for I am always conscious of a repugnance and dislike for suffering. When anything occurs to trouble me, I am filled with chagrin and vexation, so that my very life becomes a burden to me; I am incapable of doing any good work, or even of saying my usual prayers. Sometimes I begin to think strange things of God for chastising me so severely; the thought of God and heaven does not inspire me with the least consolation. Occasionally I make an effort to resign myself to the divine will, but I remain just as discontented as before; I say, as well as I can, Lord, Thy will be done; I wish to suffer, since such is Thy will; but it is only with the lips I speak so; I do not mean it in earnest; for the fact is that I have no pleasure in the cross, and, if I could, I would free myself from it altogether. How is it then possible for me to merit under such circumstances? O simple souls that you are, to complain in that way! How I pity you; not so much because you have trials to suffer, as because you do not know more clearly how fortunate you are, for the state in which you are makes you thoroughly conformable to the image of Jesus Christ crucified. I pity you, because you do not better understand what it is to suffer with patience. O most merciful Saviour, Pattern and Model of all who suffer and are truly penitent (I have said this often enough, but it seems that they will not

For they will most surely be brought to resemble Christ, although they feel their cross, and bear it because they cannot help it.

understand me), open the eyes of those poor souls; speak to them and teach them by Thy own example, that they may at last know their faults, and learn in what true patience in suffering consists. Tell us, didst Thou Thyself prepare the heavy cross Thou didst carry on Thy own shoulders up the hill of Calvary, and fasten Thyself to it with Thy own hands? No, He would answer; the envious Jews and impious executioners prepared it for Me, and made Me carry it; My heavenly Father ordained that I should receive it from My bitterest enemies, and therefore, through obedience, I allowed Myself to be crucified. And, O Lord, didst Thou feel no dislike or repugnance to the cross? Certainly, I did, so much so, that the bare thought of it made Me tremble with fear and anguish in the Garden of Gethsemani, until I sweated blood, and, lying on the ground in anguish, called out three times to My heavenly Father to take from Me that bitter chalice of suffering, and to save Me from such a cruel death, if it might be done. Such aridity of spirit did I suffer, and such extreme desolation of soul, that, while I was hanging on the cross, I openly complained before heaven and earth of having been abandoned by My heavenly Father: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"[1] But, O Lord, what kind of suffering was that? Was that the way to bear the cross patiently, willingly, and meritoriously? Did not that repugnance and aversion lessen the merit and the satisfaction? No, they rather made the suffering more meritorious; the repugnance and aversion arose merely from natural inclination; the superior and reasoning will, although it seemed overwhelmed and unwilling to submit, yet really resigned itself fully and completely to the will of My Father. And it is in this that true patience consists, which is all the greater, the more human nature and the weak flesh are opposed to it.

And although they may think they can do no good while suffering.

But there is one thing more, O dearest Saviour. When Thou wert hanging on the cross, full of pain and desolation, Thou wert incapable of doing any good. Thou couldst not work miracles, nor teach, nor heal the sick, as before. Would it not have been better and more meritorious for Thee to have freed Thyself from that heavy burden, and to have visited many countries, converting souls and furthering the glory of Thy heavenly Father? Yes, He answers, "I do always the things that please Him."[2] I hung on the cross, because such was My

[1] Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?—Matt. xxvii. 46.
[2] Quæ placita sunt ei, facio semper.—John viii. 29.

Father's will, and in that alone I did good; for never did I make My Father's glory greater before the world, than when, thus abandoned and suffering, I died on the cross. Hear, then, disconsolate souls, and learn from the example of Jesus Christ Himself, how a natural repugnance and aversion for crosses and trials will not lessen your patience and conformity to the image of your crucified God, as long as you continue with your superior and reasoning will to say to your heavenly Father: "Father, if Thou wilt, remove this chalice from me; but yet, not my will, but Thine be done."[1] Let not what I will, O Lord, but what Thou wilt, be done! Although against my will, yet let Thy holy will be accomplished in me. Never are you more like to Christ than when you have thus to suffer in body and soul, inwardly and outwardly; and therefore you cannot have a more certain sign that you are amongst the number of the elect, whom God has chosen from eternity to be made conformable to the image of His Son.

On the other hand voluptuaries have good reason to fear.

But, on the other hand, good reason for trembling have the luxurious and effeminate children of the world, who, although they have often sinned grievously and merited hell, although they still continue to sin and increase their torments in eternity, yet honor their crucified God only outwardly and with the lips, inasmuch as they do not wish to know or hear anything about mortification, self-denial, or penance, while they pamper their bodies and indulge their senses in every possible way, in idleness, comfort, and pleasure. What share can they hope for in the thorn-crowned Head? What else can they expect, but that woe that Christ pronounced on the rich and voluptuous: "Woe to you that are rich, for you have your consolation."[2] "Woe to you that are filled, for you shall hunger."[3] "Woe to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep."[4]

Conclusion and resolution to lead a life of penance.

In order, then, to avoid hearing that woe pronounced against myself, I will, if I have not done so yet, make the following resolution for the future: first, with regard to the difficulties, annoyances, discomforts, and trials that arise from my state of life, my employment, the change of the seasons and the weather, my own weakness and delicacy of constitution, or those that others cause me, or that God Himself sends me according to

[1] Pater, si vis, transfer calicem istum a me; verumtamen non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat.—Luke xxii. 42.

[2] Væ vobis divitibus, quia habetis consolationem vestram.—Luke vi. 24.

[3] Væ vobis, qui saturati estis, quia esurietis.—Ibid. 25.

[4] Væ vobis qui ridetis nunc; quia lugebitis et flebitis.—Ibid.

His own good will and pleasure, and which I can neither avoid nor change, these I will always bear patiently and humbly for God's sake and to gain heaven. Secondly, as I am bound to do in any case, I will at least avoid those pleasures which I cannot enjoy without exposing my soul to danger, and undertake those mortifications of the outward senses or inward appetites that are necessary or helpful to avoid sin. Finally, I will also often deny myself gratifications and pleasures that are quite lawful in themselves; in many things I will do violence to myself, and sometimes I will chastise my body by penitential works, that I may prove by my life and actions that I am a true Catholic and a real member of the thorn-crowned Head, and show that I truly adore a God who suffered and was crucified for me. Such is the conclusion I beg of you all to make with me, my dear brethren, not merely for to-day, but for your whole lives. Every day we commit faults that deserve punishment; every day the combat goes on between the wanton flesh and the reasoning spirit; every day a stroke of the brush must be made in order to represent Jesus Christ crucified in our lives and actions. Do not say, my dear brethren, that such a life must be a melancholy, sad, and sorrowful one; but rather acknowledge that it is a life that becomes a reasoning being and a Catholic Christian, and one who is predestined to heaven. Man must live according to reason, and be master over his inordinate appetites and inclinations. A Catholic Christian must live according to the rules laid down for him in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore he must take up his cross daily and follow his divine Master, while one who is predestined to heaven must be made conformable to the image of the Son of God. The more we deprive ourselves of sensual comforts, as far as the body is concerned, the greater and more abundant will be the heavenly consolation we shall experience in our souls; and, what should inspire us with the greatest courage, as the Council of Trent teaches with the Apostle St. Paul, we shall thereby have a firm assurance in our hands that, as we suffer with Christ, so also we shall enter with Him into glory: "Yet so if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him."[1] Amen.

[1] Si tamen compatimur, ut et conglorificemur.—Rom. viii. 17.

Another Introduction to the same Sermon for the fourth Sunday in Lent.

Text.

Sequebatur eum multitudo magna.—John vi. 2.
"A great multitude followed Him."

Introduction.

The people were still well inclined towards Christ Our Lord; they followed Him in thousands over land and sea, mountain and valley, and that, too, in hunger and thirst, so that He was obliged to work a miracle to provide them with food, lest they should die on the way. My dear brethren, are we Christians so eager nowadays in following Our Lord and Saviour? I am afraid not; for, as Thomas à Kempis says in the third book of the Imitation: "Jesus has now many who love His heavenly kingdom, but few who bear His cross; He finds many willing to sit at table with Him, but few who wish to share in His fasting; all desire to rejoice with Him, but there are few who are ready to bear trials for His sake; many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking the chalice of His sufferings." And so it is in reality. We cannot think without shuddering of crucifying and mortifying ourselves, of doing penance and practising self-denial, although these things are very necessary to us, because we have sinned, and because we are still capable of sinning, as we have seen on a former occasion. But there is still another undeniable argument to prove the necessity of doing penance, and it is that we must imitate Christ in His sufferings and bear our cross like Him, as we shall now see.—*Plan of Discourse as above.*

END OF FIFTH VOLUME.

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Hunolt, Franz,
Sermons
3 5282 00343 0173